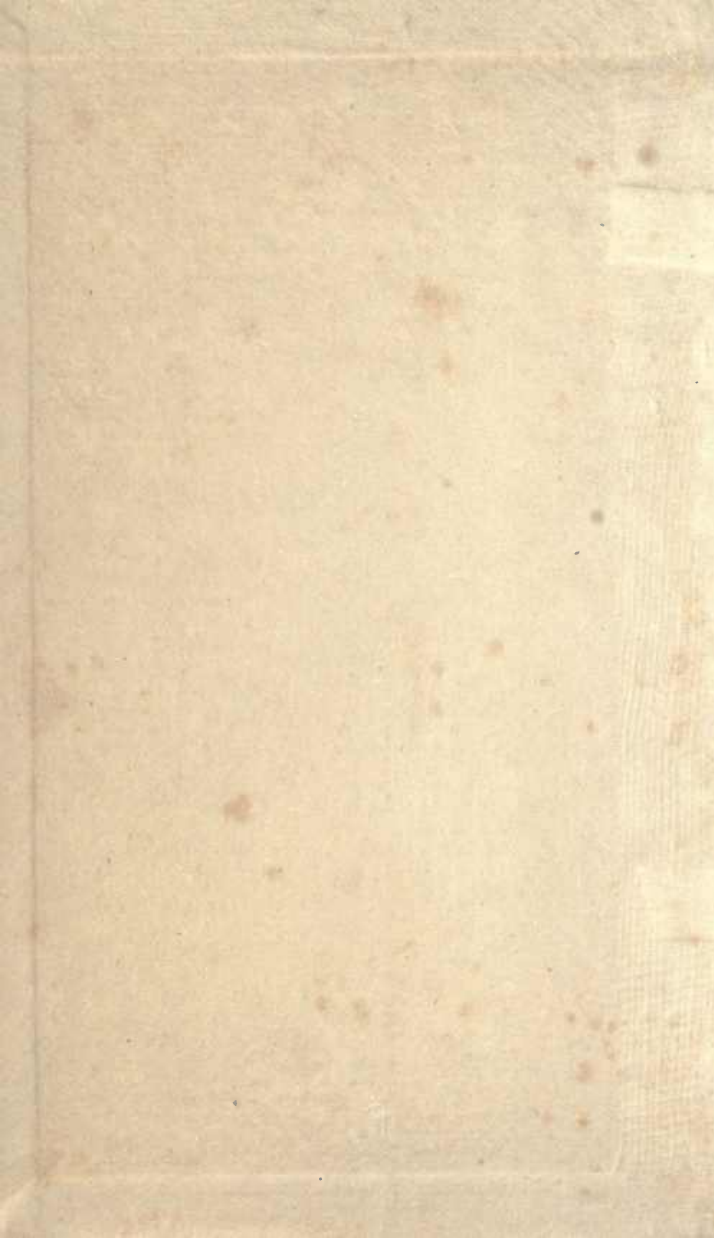




Johnson.



GENERAL POST



GENERAL POST

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

J. E. HAROLD TERRY

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TO
PERCY HUTCHISON
AND
HERBERT JAY

TO WHOSE INITIATIVE AND ENTERPRISE
THE PRODUCTION OF THIS PLAY WAS
DUE, AND WHOSE UNFAILING COURTESY
AND CONSIDERATION RENDERED THAT
PRODUCTION A LABOUR OF LOVE FOR
ALL CONCERNED, I DEDICATE
THIS VOLUME.

J. E. H. T.

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PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

SIR DENNYS BROUGHTON, Bart.

LADY BROUGHTON ... *His wife*

ALEC *His son*

BETTY *His daughter*

WILSON *His butler*

EDWARD SMITH *His tailor*

ALBERT SMITH *His tailor's brother*

ACT I 1911

ACT II 1915

ACT III 19—?

SCENE :

*The Morning-room of SIR DENNYS BROUGHTON'S
residence—"Grange Court," near Sheffingham.*

THIS play was presented for the first time in London at the Haymarket Theatre by Frederick Harrison, in conjunction with Percy Hutchison and Herbert Jay, on Wednesday, March 14th, 1917—the cast being as follows :—

SIR DENNYS BROUGHTON	...	Norman M ^C Kinnel
LADY BROUGHTON	...	Lilian Braithwaite
ALEC		Henry Daniell
BETTY		Madge Titheradge
WILSON		Edgar A. Marvin
EDWARD SMITH		George Tully
ALBERT SMITH		Fewlass Llewellyn

GENERAL POST

ACT I

SCENE: *The morning-room of SIR DENNYS BROUGHTON'S residence — "Grange Court," near Sheffieldham.*

An entirely delightful room, in the designing of which primary consideration has been given to the comfort of the occupant, without in any way detracting from the appeal to the eye.

Every advantage has been taken of its sunny situation — white paint and gaily-coloured chintzes contrive to keep it bright even upon the dullest day, while flowering plants, and bowls and vases of cut flowers, "arranged" by somebody who loves flowers and understands them, add to its charm immeasurably.

At the back of the room are three steps leading to a French window, which opens into the garden. When its doors are thrown wide, as they are at the moment that the curtain rises upon the play, one looks out on to a lawn of velvet turf shaded beneath the branches of a giant cedar, and on to flower borders radiant with bloom.

It is ten o'clock of a June morning, as perfect as the heart of man could desire, and the sunshine streaming into the room through the open windows breaks in little sparks of light upon the china

figures that LADY BROUGHTON is dusting with an almost tender care, and crowns with a halo the carefully-tended head of her son, ALEC, who reposes at his ease in an arm-chair, glancing at the head-lines of the morning paper.

LADY BROUGHTON is a good-looking woman of forty-two. She is, furthermore, an extremely nice woman, and deservedly popular. She is good-natured and kind-hearted, and slow to think evil of anybody. Her one weakness, which she shares in common with most of her social standing, is a certain pride of birth, and an inflexible belief in the importance of "belonging to the county." She divides all mankind into two classes—"The county people," and the rest. If one is of the first, one is necessarily a person to be cultivated. If not, then a person to be "nice to"—and no more. A suggestion of intimacy with anybody who is not "county" is unthinkable. "One must stick to one's own class!"

LADY BROUGHTON is a devoted wife and an adoring mother, and it is a great grief to her that she and her daughter do not "get on together." She has never had any trouble with her son. His "ideas" are in entire harmony with hers. Their affection is mutual, and LADY BROUGHTON is as much ALEC's confidant as he is hers. But with BETTY it is different. She appears to "take after" neither her father nor her mother, and is a perpetual problem and enigma to them both. Her brother regards her as a "silly little idiot." BETTY's continual complaint it is that nobody "understands" her. In this she is perfectly correct—but the main trouble is that she fails equally to understand herself. Her brother, in his mental

outlook, is of the same generation as his parents. She is, essentially, of her own. She is restless and dissatisfied, impatient of the conventions that restrain her from "doing things." Of what the "things" are that she would wish to "do" she has no very clear conception. She has read, surreptitiously, certain works arising out of the feminist movement, and their defiant and audacious phrases have fostered her revolt. BETTY is possessed of a dormant intellectuality which is not to be satisfied by the "mental pabulum" upon which "the County," as a whole, subsists and thrives. She is contemptuous of her parents' friends. They are dull and stupid. They never talk about anything worth talking about. As for her brother's boon companions, they are worse still—"mere animals," "horrible creatures." The people who "know" things and "do" things are not to be found in her own class—and so BETTY has arrived at a stage of desperation which has found its only outlet in "social work" in the slums of Sheffield. Permission to engage in this has been wrung from her parents only after the most heated argument, and desperate threats of running away if it was withheld. Up to now the expedient has seemed to "work" quite well. BETTY has become a different person—no longer "difficile," but always radiant and cheerful, and surprisingly amenable. That the reason for this is to be discovered not in her work but in the people—or more especially in one of the people—with whom she is able now to associate, her parents have not the least suspicion. A welcome atmosphere of calm has enveloped the household, and they are only too content to accept the situation and to leave it at that.

Some indication of ALEC BROUGHTON'S character has been given in the foregoing remarks. He is a young man of excellent qualities and stereotyped ideas, which, like the "Broughton chin," have been handed down from father to son through countless generations. His intellectual attainments are not such as to afford him distinction on his easy way through life—indeed, as his sister points out, they have proved insufficient to enable him to pass the "Littlego"—but that is really an advantage to him rather than a drawback. He was never intended for a career—as the term is generally understood. His destiny it is to fill adequately the place of his father, when that good gentleman shall, in the fullness of time, have passed away, and to control some 30,000 acres of land with as little loss to himself and as much profit to his neighbours as each preceding Baronet has done.

ALEC is a nice-looking lad of twenty-two, without notable virtues or notable vices. He is an excellent shot, a good horseman, and a capital hand with a cue—which accomplishments have rendered him an object of considerable admiration amongst other young fellows of his age and social position.

He is wearing "flannels" and a light coat.

ALEC. Phew! This sun's jolly hot!

LADY B. Shall I let the sun-blind down, dear?

ALEC. No, don't bother, Mater. It's not worth while. I'm going out in a minute.

LADY B. Going on the river?

ALEC. No; I told young Ronny Wareing I'd have him a single at tennis. I expect he'll give me an awful hiding. He's been playing for Oxford, you know.

LADY B. Has he got his Blue?

ALEC. No; but he's pretty sure to next year. He's jolly hot stuff!

LADY B. How proud his mother'll be if he does!

Give her my love, dear, and tell her I'm coming over to see her carnations next week. I hear they're the best in the county.

ALEC. Right-o!

SIR DENNYS BROUGHTON *enters by the window.*

He is a well-built man of slightly over fifty, and just beginning to incline to portliness. An excellent colour, a clear eye, and a weather-beaten skin are token of a healthy life, spent, for the most part, in the open. A capital fellow is SIR DENNYS—generous, free-handed, and good-natured. But his ideas upon the "county" and all that the term stands for are as fixed and rigid as are those of his wife, and if one "comes up against" them one "comes up against" a barrier of adamant. As is to be expected of such a nature, SIR DENNYS is a Tory of the Tories. There is only one country worthy to be held in honour of all nations, and that country is England. There is only one Church for a gentleman to belong to, and that is the Church of England. There is only one party that is not compound of traitors, rogues, and felons, and that is the Conservative party. These are the three great fundamental truths, and do not admit of argument.

SIR DEN. You're nice people, sitting indoors a lovely morning like this! It's perfect—simply perfect.

ALEC. It's jolly hot in here.

SIR DEN. Ah, but there's a nice breeze outside. . . .

My word, Marian, those delphiniums of yours are coming on splendidly. There'll be a fine show of them in a day or two.

LADY B. I thought they looked as though they were going to do well.

SIR DEN. They'll be magnificent—magnificent! . . . Has the paper come?

ALEC. Here you are, Pater.

SIR DEN. No, no, my boy. You finish with it. I'm in no hurry. Any news?

ALEC. Nothing of any interest — except a jolly good letter from old Cholmondeley letting into that Territorial Military Sunday idea. By Gad, he does give it 'em hot! (*He chuckles*)

SIR DEN. I'm delighted to hear it. It was high time that somebody spoke out. Do you know that they had the confounded cheek to write to me the other day and ask me if I wouldn't persuade you to join?

ALEC. I say! Did they really?

SIR DEN. They did, indeed.

LADY B. I never heard such a thing! Of all the impertinence!

SIR DEN. It's amazing! To suggest that my son should march beside my butcher, my baker, and my candlestick-maker at the head of all the rag-tag and bob-tail of the city—well, it's—it's hardly credible!

ALEC. By Gad, they *have* got a nerve!

LADY B. I hope you wrote them a very stiff letter.

SIR DEN. I ignored the thing altogether. I always think it's the best way simply to take no notice of these things.

ALEC. I can't help laughing at their cheek! Your tailor's a captain in 'em, isn't he?

SIR DEN. Something of the sort.

LADY B. He really looks very well in his uniform. I saw them marching down the High Street the other day, and I was surprised to see what a good-looking lot of men they were.

SIR DEN. They may look all right. I've no doubt they do. You can paint a tin soldier to look well. But wait until we come to war. Then we shall find out our mistake.

ALEC. By Jove, yes!

SIR DEN. Now the old Volunteers were a fine set of men—splendid fellows. But this wretched Government couldn't leave them alone—and what's the result? Do you find them having anything to do with this territorial nonsense? Not one in ten! More than half the backbone of the country lost to it!

LADY B. (*Sighing*) I don't know what we're coming to. It all seems very sad.

SIR DEN. It *is* sad! But it's what's bound to happen once the democracy gets the upper hand. The decent people simply withdraw from public life. Take a man like myself, for instance. Am I to be at the beck and call of a pack of self-seeking rogues, who have no idea who their grandfathers were, and, very often, not even who their fathers were?

LADY B. Indeed, no!

SIR DEN. It's a bad look-out—a *very* bad look-out! . . . By the way, Alec, isn't there any news from Morocco this morning?

ALEC. Germany's sent a gun-boat to Agadir.

SIR DEN. What for?

ALEC. I don't know; and the paper ain't very clear on the point—but they seem to think it may mean trouble for us.

LADY B. Not war, surely?

ALEC. That's the idea.

LADY B. Oh, I do hope not!

SIR DEN. (*With jovial scorn*) War! Pshaw!
Don't you worry your head, my dear. We shan't see war with Germany in our time, or in Alec's either, for the matter o' that!

LADY B. (*Not with entire confidence*) I hope you're right, dear.

SIR DEN. Right? Of course I'm right! Germany's not such a fool as to tackle us. She knows jolly well that she'd be wiped off the map in a week. Besides, she's dependent on us for more than half her trade. D'you think she's going to risk losing that? Not she!

ALEC. Then what's she making all these preparations for?—laying down new Dreadnoughts, and all the rest of it!

SIR DEN. Bluff, my boy, bluff! She's hoping to frighten us into giving her what she knows she can never hope to take from us by force. And I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she succeeds! We're doing all we can to encourage her! We've cut down the Army, and now they want us to cut down the Navy. Upon my word, it's pitiable! It really is!

ALEC. Well, we shall see what she does about this Agadir business.

SIR DEN. She'll climb down, my boy! It's the only thing for her to do! You see if I'm not right.

ALEC. Is Betty still as set on going to Germany as she was?

LADY B. No, thank goodness! This work that she's doing now seems to have taken her mind off it.

ALEC. What *is* she doing?

SIR DEN. I've asked that question a hundred times

if I've asked it once, and nobody seems able to give me an answer.

LADY B. She never tells me anything about it, but, so far as I can make out, it's social work—soup kitchens and care-committees, and so on!

ALEC. Sounds exciting!

SIR DEN. Well, anyhow, it keeps her out of mischief—and that's the great thing. We never had any peace in the house until we agreed to let her take it up.

LADY B. She's certainly been much easier to do with since.

ALEC. I can't make her out. She's the rummest girl I ever knew. Why can't she be content to be like other people? She could have such a jolly good time here if she liked—but, no, she must needs go trapesing down into the slums of Sheffingham, doing all sorts of dirty work which might quite well be done by—well—by somebody who isn't a lady. I think it's disgusting, myself!

LADY B. My dear, I gave the problem up long ago. Betty's a law unto herself.

SIR DEN. (*Comfortably*) She'll grow out of it. It's just a little foolishness that lots of girls get at her age. It's like the mumps or the measles. They've got to have 'em some time. Far better have 'em whilst they're young. Get over 'em quicker.

ALEC. But she's so beastly rude to everybody—so confoundedly superior! Everlastingly jawing about intellect, and rot of that sort—"things that matter," whatever they may be! She told Ronny Wareing the other night—a chap who's just going to get his Blue!—that his mental outlook would disgrace a Hottentot!

SIR DEN. She shouldn't have done that.

ALEC. Your friends aren't good enough for her—

neither are mine! I'd like to know who she meets in Sheffingham who's so much superior to them.

LADY B. I really don't know. It was Miss Prendergast who got her to take it up.

ALEC. That old frump! I shouldn't have thought she was remarkable for her intellect.

LADY B. Well, anyhow, we can be certain that she doesn't associate with anybody who isn't desirable. Miss Prendergast assured me that the people who were doing it were all quite nice.

ALEC. H'm! Well, I hope she's right.

WILSON *enters. He carries a note upon a salver.*

WILSON. A note for you, m'lady.

LADY B. (*Having taken the note from the salver and observed that it has been sent by hand*) Any answer?

WILSON. I don't think so, m'lady. The young woman who brought it has gone away again.

LADY B. Oh! (*She makes him a gesture of dismissal*) That's all right then, Wilson.

WILSON *bows and withdraws.*

ALEC. Well, I think I'll be off now, Mater.

SIR DEN. Where're you going to?

ALEC. The Wareings.

LADY B. (*As she tears open the flap of the envelope*) This note's from Mrs Wareing. There may be some message for you in it. You'd better wait and see.

ALEC. All right.

LADY BROUGHTON *proceeds to read the letter.*

When ALEC rose from his seat with the intention of going out, he gave the newspaper he had been reading to his father, who, not finding his spectacles in their accustomed pocket, has been looking all over for them since.

SIR DEN. (*To ALEC*) Have you seen my glasses anywhere?

ALEC. No.

He proceeds to join in the search for them, which is arrested by a sudden exclamation from LADY BROUGHTON.

LADY B. Oh! This is *too* bad!

SIR DEN. What's the matter?

LADY B. (*Holding the note out to him*) Read that!

SIR DEN. I've lost my glasses. I—You read it, dear.

LADY BROUGHTON reads the letter aloud.

LADY B. "My dearest Marian,

I know you dislike people who poke their noses into things that don't concern them. So do I. They're loathsome creatures! But sometimes one feels that it's one's bounden duty to open peoples' eyes to things that are going on behind their backs, and of which they have no idea. I hate telling tales out of school, and I'm sure Betty will never forgive me if she finds out——"

A dawning comprehension shows in ALEC's face. He looks up with a little chuckle—not exactly malicious, but distinctly impish.

ALEC. Betty, eh? This sounds as if it might be quite interesting!

SIR DEN. (*Impatiently*) What's it all about?

LADY B. Sh-sh! (*She continues reading*) "—if she finds out, but I do think you ought to know, dear, what people are saying. Ever since Christmas I've heard all sorts of stories connecting her name with that of a Mr Smith—a tailor, I believe, in Sheffingham——"

All the laughter goes out of ALEC's face. He is consumed by righteous indignation.

ALEC. Well, I'm——!

SIR DEN. (*Who is beginning to grow irritable*)
Smith! What's Smith to do with Betty?

LADY B. Just wait, dear, and you'll hear. (*She returns to the letter*) "I took no notice of them for a long time. I just put it down to malicious gossip. Ethel Prendergast had told me that the man was one of her workers in the slums, and I knew that Betty was, too. But last night I happened to be in Sheffingham rather late, and, as we were driving home, we passed Betty walking arm-in-arm with somebody. I didn't recognize the man she was with at all, but my maid, who was sitting in front with the chauffeur, tells me that it was this person, Smith, and that she has often seen Betty walking home with him." (*She crumples the letter in her hand, and exclaims in exasperation:—*) Did you ever hear such a thing? Arm-in-arm with a common tailor!

ALEC. It's about the thickest thing I've ever heard!
My sister! Well, I'll be——! His sense of personal injury renders him incoherent)

SIR DEN. But I thought you said that Miss Prendergast had assured you——

LADY B. She did! I shall never forgive Ethel Prendergast—never, as long as I live!

ALEC. What're you going to do about it?

LADY B. What *can* we do? It makes me so ashamed that——

SIR DEN. Oh, there must be some mistake! Dash it, we've only Elsie Wareing's word for it! And I don't see how she can be certain who she passes in a car at night-time! We must give the girl a chance to deny the story. . . . Where is Betty?

BETTY *appears suddenly at the window, and, replying to SIR DENNY'S enquiry, drops him a mock curtsy.*

BETTY. (*Saucily*) Obedient to her father's call, she comes!

She trips gaily down the steps, a basket of lilies in her arms. She is a bonny girl with any amount in her. The rest of her characteristics have been told already.

BETTY *has much to learn and more to unlearn—and none can teach her save Experience. She goes in coaxing fashion to her mother.*

Mother, dearie, you won't be cross with me for cutting all your lovely lilies, will you? But they are so badly off for flowers at the hospital—and these were so heavenly that I just couldn't resist them!

LADY BROUGHTON *makes no reply. There is an awkward silence.*

What's the matter?

SIR DEN. (*Uncomfortably*) Well, you see, my dear—er—the fact is—er— (*To LADY BROUGHTON*) Oh, show her the letter!

BETTY. A letter? Who from?

LADY B. (*Holding it out to her*) You'd better read it.

BETTY. Need I, mother? Can't you tell me what's in it?

SIR DEN. (*Hurriedly*) No, no! You read it!

BETTY. It's not to say that anybody's—dead, is it?

LADY B. (*With rising impatience*) No, no, child! Read it!

BETTY. Oh, very well! Only I thought you all looked so grave—

She reads the letter. All watch her curiously. As she reads she gives an exclamation of annoyance, and finally she flings the letter from her.

(*Indignantly*) Why can't people mind their own business?

Her outburst confirms the worst fears of her parents and her brother. They exchange despairing glances.

LADY B. You don't deny the truth of what Mrs Wareing says, then?

BETTY. (*Defiantly*) It's nothing to be ashamed of.

ALEC. Nothing to be ashamed of! Good Heavens!

BETTY. (*To ALEC*) No, it isn't!—and, even if it was, it's no business of yours!

LADY B. (*On the verge of breaking down*) Oh, Betty, Betty, how could you?

SIR DEN. (*Forgetful that the old-fashioned style of exerting the parental authority is not of the least avail where his daughter is concerned*) Come here, girl! Have you got the audacity to stand before me and declare that you see nothing to be ashamed of in being seen walking about the country arm-in-arm with my tailor?

BETTY. It's not a bit of use talking to me like that, Father! Mr Smith may be your tailor. I don't say that he isn't. But he is, also, a most charming and well-educated gentleman.

ALEC. Gentleman! Tcha!

BETTY. Oh, not at all your idea of a gentleman! He doesn't drink, and he doesn't swear, and he doesn't pick up girls!

LADY B. (*In shocked protest*) Betty! Betty! My dear!

SIR DEN. Well, upon my word! Really I——!

ALEC. He seems to have picked you up all right!

BETTY. Yes; that *would* be your idea of a gentleman's retort!

SIR DEN. Will you two stop wrangling! Really,

Betty, you amaze me! How you can be so indelicate—particularly in front of your mother!—
I——

LADY BROUGHTON *gives a gesture as much as to say, "Oh, I'm quite used to it!"*

BETTY. Isn't Mother supposed to know what goes on in the world?

LADY B. To listen to you, dear, one would think that Mother wasn't supposed to know anything.

SIR DEN. Or Father, either!

LADY B. I know you think us old-fashioned, and stupid—well, perhaps we are. But whatever we've done for you, Betty, we've tried to do for your good.

BETTY. That's the worst of it!

SIR DEN. (*Amazed*) Worst of it?

BETTY. Yes. Because you've done wrong, feeling honestly that it was right.

SIR DEN. Well, I'm——!

BETTY. I was never meant for the sort of life that you want me to live—for the sort of friends that you want me to have. They're all content to grow up like vegetables. I'm not! I want to make something of my life. I want to be with the people who *do* things, and who can teach me how to do things, too.

ALEC. Such as tailoring, for example!

BETTY. I *won't* be the slave of my ancestors! They're dead and gone, thank goodness, and their ghosts aren't going to bother me! I don't care a scrap who my grandfather was. I should have been just as happy if he'd been a rag-and-bone man. The fact that he wasn't isn't going to keep me from knowing the people whose grandfathers were—if they're people worth knowing.

SIR DEN. What's all this nonsense got to do with Smith?

ALEC. I expect *his* grandfather was a rag-and-bone man!

BETTY. (*With intensity*) You *are* a beast, Alec!

SIR DEN. Will you please answer my question?

BETTY. Mr Smith is the first man I've ever met who's got a brain worth calling a brain!

SIR DEN. (*Highly offended*) Oh, indeed!

BETTY. There you go, you see! You get annoyed with me just because—oh, what's the use of talking? (*She turns suddenly and almost violently upon her father*) What do *you* know of Sudermann or Nietzsche?

SIR DEN. Nothing to their credit!

BETTY'S *sense of humour gets the better of her annoyance. She bursts into a peal of laughter.*

BETTY. Oh, Father, you are funny! If only Mr Smith could have heard you say that, he——

SIR DEN. (*Apoplectically*) Damn Mr Smith!

LADY B. My dear!

SIR DEN. I mean it! Now listen to me, Betty. This—er—acquaintanceship of yours must cease at once.

BETTY. Why?

SIR DEN. Because I say so!—and there's an end of it!

BETTY. I'm afraid I don't agree with you.

SIR DEN. What do you mean?

BETTY. What I say. If you can give me any reason—except pure snobbishness—why I should not know Mr Smith, I'm quite willing to listen to you. Otherwise——

SIR DEN. Do you dare to insinuate that your mother and I are snobs?

BETTY. Supposing that Mr Smith, the tailor, had been Lord Tom Noddy, the millionaire, would you have made all this fuss?

LADY B. My dear, what is the use of supposing?

BETTY. Would you?

A slight pause. BETTY persists:—

Would you?

SIR DEN. Your Mother and I are not here to be cross-questioned by you. Dash it! One might think that our positions were entirely reversed, and that we were being called to account by you for—
for—for——

BETTY. For being snobs! So you are!

SIR DEN. Be silent, girl! I will not tolerate this impertinence to your mother and to myself.

LADY B. Betty fails to realize that there is a difference between snobbishness and proper pride—a quality, I'm sorry to say, which she seems to lack altogether. One can be quite nice to one's inferiors, without being called upon to be intimate with them.

SIR DEN. Precisely!

BETTY. Mr Smith is *not* my inferior! He's the superior of anybody in this room!

ALEC. Well, I'm dashed!

BETTY. (*To ALEC*) It wouldn't have taken *him* three years to pass the Littlego!

ALEC. No? Well, you ought to know more than I do about Board School scholars!

BETTY. You needn't be a cad!

SIR DEN. I've told you two before I will *not* have this wrangling! Listen to your Mother, Betty, and attend to what she has to say.

LADY B. I only wanted to try and point out that none of us—particularly a young unmarried girl—can afford to openly defy convention.

SIR DEN. Exactly—exactly!

LADY B. We know that Betty has been foolish, very foolish—but only foolish. Not everybody will be so charitable. (*She addresses her daughter directly*) Have you thought of the sort of thing that'll be said of you?

BETTY. (*Obstinately dense*) No. What will be said?

LADY B. (*Not without irony*) With your knowledge of the world, dear, I shouldn't have thought that it would have been necessary for me to—to go into details.

BETTY. You mean that your friends—the *real* ladies and gentlemen that you and Alec are so keen on—will suggest that I am Mr Smith's mis—

Before she can pronounce the second syllable of the word, SIR DENNYS has interrupted with a scandalized and warning cry of:—

SIR DEN. Betty!

LADY B. (*Quite quietly, but with a tightening of her lips*) Just a minute, dear. If Betty wants plain speaking, she'd better have it. (*She turns to her daughter*) I did not mean that that is what is likely to be said—yet. But it might soon come to it. If a girl of good family, who has been gently brought up, and given every opportunity of associating with people of her own class, deliberately chooses to stoop to her inferiors for her friends—if she is content to demean herself to such an extent as to behave like a domestic servant on her night out, and to be seen walking down dark lanes arm-in-arm with her father's tradesmen—then she must expect to be treated accordingly. A girl who has so lost her self-respect doesn't deserve, and certainly will never have, the respect of other people. Her own class will refuse to have

anything further to do with her—and that's what'll happen to you if you're going on like this.

SIR DEN. (*To BETTY*) I associate myself completely with what your mother has said.

ALEC. Yes, by Jove, you put it jolly well, Mater!

BETTY *says not a word, and they interpret her silence as a sign of yielding. ALEC continues:—*

Dash it all, Betty, you might think of us a bit! Nice sort of asses we shall feel if this yarn gets about. It'll mean that we shall simply have to clear out, and leave the place altogether. And I do think that that'd be rough luck on the Mater. It's simply beastly the position you're putting her and the Pater into. It's pretty rotten for me, too—though I know I don't count much. How can I go to the Wareings now—after this has happened? I should be simply too ashamed to show my face.

BETTY. (*Quite calmly, and with a little tired smile*) Poor Alec! I suppose you just can't help being a snob.

SIR DEN. (*Combatively*) Eh?

BETTY. Oh, don't let's begin it all over again. We've said quite sufficient nasty things already to spoil this lovely day. But I do want you to have your facts right.

SIR DEN. (*Grunts*) Well?

BETTY. (*Very quietly*) Mr Smith has brought me back from Sheffingham four times. Each time because I asked him. I have only taken his arm once—when it was so dark that I couldn't see my way. That must have been the time that Mrs Wareing passed us. I remember a car did nearly run over us.

LADY B. You actually asked this man to see you home?

BETTY. Yes.

LADY B. (*With a sigh of desperation*) Oh!

SIR DEN. But if you didn't like coming back alone—and I certainly shouldn't have wished you to do so—why didn't you have the car to meet you?

BETTY. Because I preferred to walk back with Mr Smith.

LADY B. You mean you deliberately planned to be alone with him?

BETTY. I suppose so.

ALEC. But—dash it!—one might think you were in love with the fellow!

BETTY. (*Still very quietly*) I am.

The pause of stupefaction which ensues is broken upon by WILSON, who enters, and stands by the door awaiting permission to speak.

SIR DEN. (*Testily*) What is it, Wilson? What is it?

WILSON. Mr Smith to see you, Sir Dennys.

There is silence for a moment. SIR DENNYS, LADY BROUGHTON and ALEC look significantly from one to the other. BETTY alone is, to all outward seeming, unaffected by the announcement. She avoids the eyes of the others, and looks straight ahead of her.

SIR DEN. (*Uncomfortably*) H'm—yes—yes—that's very awkward! I remember now I arranged for him to come and measure me for a new suit this morning. T't—t't—t't—! Dear, oh dear! How very tiresome! Better show him into the library, Wilson, and say that I'll see him in a moment.

WILSON. Very good, Sir Dennys.

He goes out. The moment that the door has closed upon him, and before anybody else has a chance to say a word, BETTY pounces upon her father.

BETTY. (*Breathlessly*) Are you going to say anything to Mr Smith?

SIR DEN. That must remain to be seen. I shall do as I feel to be best.

BETTY. Because if you do—I warn you!—if you say a single word, I shall go straight away and marry him!

The threat affects SIR DENNYS like a blow in the belt. It renders him incapable of speech. He gives vent to a series of strange and inarticulate noises. Before he can recover himself sufficiently to make any reply, BETTY has turned on her heel and passed through the window into the garden, disregarding her mother's cry of:—

LADY B. Betty! Betty!

SIR DEN. Well I'm—I'm—! (*He gulps down his indignation as though it were a potato stuck in his throat*) Here's a pretty kettle of fish! My daughter in love with my tailor!—and glorying in it! Actually glorying in it!

ALEC. I don't believe it! She's only trying to frighten you by talking through her hat! She doesn't mean what she says.

LADY B. There you're wrong, dear! Betty always means what she says. It's one of her worst faults.

SIR DEN. (*Pathetic in his helplessness*) Well—well—well, what the devil are we going to do now?

ALEC. Pack her off to Germany! She's always wanted to go there. And let her walk out with all the tailors in Berlin, if she likes. It won't matter to us.

LADY B. (*Protestingly*) Alec, dear, please!

SIR DEN. I can't think where she gets it from. My sisters were a little—er—advanced, I know. But, dash it all, they did draw the line at a tailor!

ALEC. Didn't one of them run off with a jockey?

LADY B. My dear!—a *gentleman*-jockey!

SIR DEN. What amazes me is that Smith should have permitted himself to be so—so led away! I've always found him a most sober, sensible, and respectful fellow.

LADY B. (*Wisely*) I've yet to discover the man whose head is screwed so firmly on his shoulders that a pretty girl can't turn it—if she's determined to.

SIR DEN. I'm quite aware that the fault is mainly Betty's, but, all the same, I don't think I'll see Smith this morning. I should only lose my temper with him, and—and——

LADY B. I think you ought to, dear.

SIR DEN. You think I ought to say something to him about——?

LADY B. Certainly I do.

SIR DEN. It's so very difficult. I—er—he's the only decent tailor in the place, and I don't want to lose him.

LADY B. It can be done quite tactfully.

SIR DEN. Yes, perhaps so, but—you heard what Betty said—supposing he were to mention it to her——

LADY B. There are ways, dear, of pointing out to him that that would be a very foolish thing to do.

SIR DEN. H'm, yes—I suppose there are. But what are we going to do if he's in love with her.

LADY B. (*Sententiously*) Tailors can't afford to fall in love with the daughters of their best customers.

SIR DEN. No—no—p'raps they can't! I didn't think of that. But, all the same, it's very unpleasant! It's most unpleasant. 'Pon my word, if people only realized what trouble children give

one there wouldn't be another christening in this land for the next century !

He mops his brow in agitated fashion.

LADY B. Will you see Smith in the library ?

SIR DEN. No ; I think I'd rather see him in here, if you don't mind. The library's so gloomy. It'd make me feel ten times worse. It's bright and sunny in here, and——

LADY B. Very well, dear. I'll tell Wilson to show him in. Come along, Alec.

ALEC. Right-o ! Good luck to you, Pater. Mind you give 'im socks !

LADY B. (*At the door*) My dear boy, I do wish you'd get out of that dreadful habit of speaking to your Father as if he were a hosier !

ALEC *laughs*. LADY BROUGHTON *is nearly out of the room when an afterthought occurs to her and she returns.*

Dennys, I don't think it'd do any harm if you hinted to Smith that Betty is likely to be going out of England immediately, and to be away for some time.

SIR DEN. (*Who has been absorbed in uncomfortable thoughts*) Eh? . . . Oh, very well, very well !

LADY BROUGHTON *goes out*. ALEC *has preceded her.*

Before WILSON ushers MR SMITH into the room there ensues a slight interval which SIR DENNYS occupies in pacing moodily up and down the carpet.

WILSON *throws open the door and announces :—*

WILSON. Mr Smith.

EDWARD SMITH *enters*. *He is a tall and well-built man in the prime of life, wearing the*

peace-time uniform of a Captain in a Territorial regiment. Seeing him thus, nobody would imagine him to be engaged in trade. He does not suggest the amateur soldier in the least. He looks as though he had been in the "Service" for years. These observations apply equally to him when in mufti. His upright bearing, his bronzed cheeks, and his little "hogged" moustache are eloquent of a military training.

Having remarked that EDWARD SMITH is, in the main, self-educated, it becomes superfluous to add that his education is eminently superior to that of the average public school and 'Varsity man. He is a person of considerable culture, which is lacking only in a knowledge of the more subtle niceties of social etiquette. Brought into unprofessional contact with his social superiors, he exhibits a certain lack of ease, is prone to commit certain little gaucheries that make it evident that—in the catch-phrase of "the County"—he is "not quite the clean potato." Let it not be imagined that he would be guilty of an obvious solecism in such circumstances, but he never knows quite what to do with his hands.

He brings with him into the room a leather case, containing patterns and samples of cloth, and a small hand-bag in which he carries the implements of his trade—tape measure, scissors, chinks, pins, and so on.

After greeting SIR DENNYS he places these on the floor, and proceeds to unstrap the case containing his patterns.

SMITH. Good morning, Sir Dennys.

SIR DENNYS. (*Gruffly*) Mornin'!

SMITH. Another lovely day.

SIR DENNYS. Yes.

SMITH. Going to be very hot this afternoon, though, I'm afraid.

SIR DEN. Oh?

SMITH. There was quite a pleasant breeze first thing—but that's died down.

SIR DEN. H'm.

A pause, during which SIR DENNYS inspects SMITH's uniform with critical and disapproving eye.

Got up to kill, I see.

SMITH. (*Laughing*) Oh, only in sham fight, Sir Dennys. I must apologize for coming like this, but we've got an inspection on Elsham Common at 1.0, and it doesn't give me time to get back to Sheffingham and change. I felt sure that, in the circumstances, you——

SIR DEN. That's all right—that's all right.

SMITH. Thank you. . . . It's a lounge suit and a dinner-jacket that you require, isn't it, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. Yes. . . . You know, Smith, I'm very disappointed in you.

SMITH. Really, Sir Dennys? I'm sorry to hear that.

SIR DEN. I always used to think you a good business man—a chap of sound common sense.

SMITH. Yes?

SIR DEN. And I'm amazed to see a man I always considered a sound Conservative actively supporting a measure which is a disgrace even to a Radical Government.

SMITH. You are referring to——?

SIR DEN. To this preposterous Territorial business.

SMITH. But why, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. It was doomed to failure from the start.

SMITH. I don't think so.

SIR DEN. But I say it was!

SMITH. (*Very politely*) Oh, of course, in that case—— . . . Perhaps you'd like to see some patterns, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. (*Taking a bundle of patterns into his hand, but not examining them*) Are you a believer in this "German menace"?

He asks the question as though it were incredible that anybody should be.

SMITH. I'm afraid I am, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Well, you amaze me! 'Pon my word, you do!

SMITH. Have you seen this morning's paper?

SIR DEN. You mean this Morocco business?

SMITH. Yes.

SIR DEN. Bluff!—sheer bluff!—as I was saying to my son just now. It's astounding that you should permit yourself to be taken in by it. It's just what the Germans want. That's what they're after. If you're representative of the country, Heaven help us!

SMITH. But even supposing that you're right, Sir Dennys, there's surely no harm in being prepared.

SIR DEN. Prepared! You don't call this Territorial nonsense being prepared! Why, where are your officers? And what use are they when you've got 'em? I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you can't expect the men to follow Tom, Dick, and Harry from Goodness knows where. So long as the upper classes refuse to come into it, the thing's doomed to failure.

SMITH. Lord Madeley's our Colonel.

SIR DEN. Madeley! A discredited stockbroker, who

got his title by sheer jobbery! I should hardly take him as representative of the upper class.

SMITH. What about General Tenby, then, Sir Dennys? He's a warm supporter of the scheme.

SIR DEN. It's his job. He's paid for it. Besides, I referred to the upper class as a whole. There may be isolated examples, but——

SMITH. Yes, as a whole, the upper class is hanging back badly.

SIR DEN. (*Objecting strongly to the term*) Hanging back!

SMITH. They ought to come into it, Sir Dennys. It's the duty of every able-bodied man in the country—no matter what his social standing.

SIR DEN. (*Warmly*) And I say it is *not*, Smith! It is emphatically *not* the duty of any man who believes in the Conservative policy as I do—and as you ought to do!—to support any Radical movement. No good ever came out of evil!

SMITH. But, Sir Dennys——!

SIR DEN. (*Holding up a restraining hand and speaking in his most magisterial tone*) That's quite sufficient, Smith. There's another subject upon which I wish to speak to you, and I am particularly anxious to approach it with an open mind. I don't wish to feel annoyed with you beforehand. . . . Now, let me see, what are these patterns?

SMITH. For a dinner-suit, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. (*Running through them rapidly*) They all look much of a muchness to me. Show me one that'll wear well.

SMITH. (*Taking the book of patterns from him*) Allow me. (*He selects a pattern*) We can confidently recommend that, Sir Dennys. We sell a lot of it.

SIR DEN. (*Examining it*) Looks to me as though it'd get shiny quickly.

SMITH. Oh, no. That surface polish all comes out in the pressing.

SIR DEN. H'm. What'll this work out at?

SMITH. (*Examining the label on the back of the pattern*) We can do you a suit in that cloth, Sir Dennys, at eight guineas.

SIR DEN. And quite sufficient, too! Can't you make it a bit less?

SMITH. Well, we might manage to reduce it to seven guineas—but, in that case, of course, we couldn't put you in such a good lining.

SIR DEN. Oh, the lining don't matter a damn! What's the good of paying money for things that nobody but your servant sees? I don't believe in it.

SMITH. Have you any particular wishes with regard to the style of the suit, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. No. Plenty of pockets and none o' that beastly braid down the side o' the leg. Can't bear it! Sheer affectation!

SMITH *makes some entries in a note-book, and then proceeds to fetch another book of patterns from his case.*

SMITH. And now for the lounge suit, Sir Dennys. Do you wish a dark cloth or a light?

SIR DEN. Oh—medium. Not too dark.

SMITH. (*Carrying the book of patterns over to SIR DENNYS*) We've a very nice thing here, Sir Dennys, that I think ought to suit you. It's quite new too. Only just come in.

SIR DEN. It's a curious colour. What d'you call it?

SMITH. It's a little difficult to define, Sir Dennys. It's not quite a grey, and it's not quite a brown. It's known in the trade as "Elephant's breath."

SIR DEN. Elephant's what?

SMITH. Breath, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. And d'you think I'm going to be seen walking about Sheffingham dressed in Elephant's breath? I never heard such a preposterous suggestion. It sounds positively indecent. . . . What are those things over there? (*He points to a roll of patterns in SMITH's case*)

SMITH. (*Holding them up*) These, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. Yes.

SMITH. A selection of tweeds, Sir Dennys—Donegals.

SIR DEN. Oh—no crocodile coughs, or hyæna's hiccoughs amongst 'em?

SMITH. (*Laughing*) No, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Then let's have a look at 'em.

SMITH *gives them to him.*

Ah! that's more like it. (*He runs rapidly through the patterns until he chances upon one that takes his fancy*) How d'you think that would make up, eh?

SMITH. It ought to make up very well.

SIR DEN. Good wearing stuff?

SMITH. Guaranteed.

SIR DEN. How much?

SMITH. Trousers and breeches?

SIR DEN. Yes.

SMITH. Five pounds fifteen.

SIR DEN. All right. Make it exactly like the last you made for me.

SMITH. The styles have altered considerably since then, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. I don't care. I hate change. I never change myself, and I don't intend to change my clothes.

SMITH. (*With a twinkle in his eye*) I beg your pardon, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. (*Realizing what he has said*) To change my—er—that is, the style of them.

SMITH. I see.

SIR DEN. And now about this other matter—

SMITH. Excuse me, Sir Dennys, but I really think I ought to take fresh measurements—not the trousers, perhaps—but certainly the coat and vest. It's some time now since we did, and—er—
(*He glances significantly at SIR DENNYS' girth*)

SIR DEN. (*Following the direction of his glance*) You don't mean to say that you think——?

SMITH. I'm rather afraid.

SIR DEN. Oh, very well. Get on with it. I suppose I can talk at the same time.

SMITH. Certainly, Sir Dennys.

He opens his handbag and takes from it his tape measure.

SIR DEN. I understand, Smith, that you are given to good works in your off-hours.

SMITH. Good works? In what way, Sir Dennys?

He goes behind SIR DENNYS and proceeds to measure the length of his coat from underneath the collar to the extremity of the skirt.

SIR DEN. You are one of Miss Prendergast's band of—er—whatever they are.

SMITH. (*As he enters the measurement in his notebook*) Thirty, exactly.

SIR DEN. (*Thinking that SMITH refers to the number of Miss Prendergast's helpers*) Thirty, eh? . . . Well, you can make it twenty-nine for the future.

SMITH. Oh, believe me, that wouldn't suit you, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. You mean it wouldn't suit *you*!

SMITH. It doesn't make any difference to me, Sir Dennys. I shan't have to wear the coat.

SIR DEN. Wear the—? What the devil d'you think you're talking about, Smith?

SMITH. About the length of your coat, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Length of my coat be hanged! I do wish you'd stop fiddling about behind my back there, and attend to what I'm saying to you.

SMITH, who is continuing quite placidly with his measurement of SIR DENNYS' back—this time from the centre of the back to the side—jots down a figure in his note-book.

SMITH. (*Sotto voce*) Seven—a half. (*Aloud*) Yes, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. I was asking you whether you are or whether you are not interested in the—er—the night club that Miss Prendergast got up in Sheffingham.

SMITH. Miss Prendergast started a night club in Sheffingham! You amaze me, Sir Dennys!

SIR DEN. For boys!—newsboys!

He looks at SMITH suspiciously, uncertain whether or no he is "having his leg pulled."

SMITH. Oh!—in the Cherry Street School.

SIR DEN. (*Irritably*) I don't know where it is!

SMITH. Yes, I occasionally lend a hand down there. . . . Would you mind raising your arms, Sir Dennys? . . . That's sufficient, thank you.

He proceeds to pass the measure round SIR DENNYS' chest.

SIR DEN. I take it, then, that at this—er—club, you have become acquainted with my daughter.

SMITH. (*Regarding the measurement recorded by the tape, and hardly conscious of what SIR DENNYS has said—with genuine enthusiasm*) My word, Sir

Dennys, there's many a younger man would envy you that!

SIR DEN. Are you referring to my daughter, sir?

SMITH. Good gracious, no! I meant your chest measurement.

SIR DEN. (*Mollified—indeed extremely pleased*)
Eh? . . . Oh—oh—it's pretty good, is it?

SMITH. Thirty-nine, a half! I should think it is!
Why, you must have an expansion of at least forty-three.

SIR DEN. (*Much gratified*) And a little more.

SMITH. Splendid! . . . Yes, I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Broughton.

SIR DEN. (*Brought back to earth with a bump*)
Ah! . . . Look here, Smith, it's impossible to talk with you dancing round me all the time. Can't you cut this measuring business short?

SMITH. Well, I don't suppose we need measure the sleeve, Sir Dennys. Your arm's not likely to have grown. But I certainly think we ought to—er—

He waves a hand in the direction of SIR DENNYS' "lower chest."

SIR DEN. (*Almost unconsciously undoing the lower buttons of his vest*) You mean—er——?

SMITH *nods*.

Well, come on! Get it over!

The tape is applied and withdrawn. SIR DENNYS watches SMITH'S face the while he reads the record as anxiously as if he were waiting to learn his fate after examination by his doctor.

SMITH. (*Shaking his head*) T't—t't—t't—t't—t't!

SIR DEN. (*Agitatedly*) As bad as that?

SMITH *nods*.

Well, what is it?

SMITH. Forty-one, a quarter—just over.

SIR DEN. How much more is that than last time?

SMITH. Nearly two inches.

SIR DEN. Two inches! Good Heavens! That means I must begin those confounded exercises all over again! . . . This is one of the most trying mornings I've ever known. Everything's occurred to upset me! . . . Sit down, Smith. Sit down.

SMITH. Thank you, Sir Dennys.

He takes a chair, and SIR DENNYS seats himself opposite to him.

SIR DEN. (*Distinctly uncomfortable*) Now, to return to this Prendergast affair—I understand that on one or two occasions you have been so kind as to see my daughter safely home.

SMITH. I have had that privilege.

SIR DEN. Well—er—Lady Broughton and I are extremely obliged to you for your courtesy, but—er—well—er——

SMITH. I quite understand, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. I was going to say that my daughter will, unfortunately, have to—er—to—er—give up her work here almost immediately. I don't know whether she told you that she is going abroad for some time.

SMITH. That really isn't necessary, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Not necessary? What d'you mean?

SMITH. I have made arrangements to leave Sheffing-ham myself.

SIR DEN. You're surely not suggesting that my daughter's departure is in any way connected with you?

SMITH. (*Very quietly*) Then why have you told me about it?

This direct question takes the wind completely out of SIR DENNYS' sails. He is at a loss for a reply. SMITH continues :—

I'm glad that you've broached this subject, Sir Dennys. It's been on my mind for some time. I'm very glad indeed that you've given me the opportunity of mentioning it.

SIR DEN. I forbid you to tell me that you're in love with my daughter!

SMITH. I shouldn't dream of doing so, Sir Dennys. Tailors can't afford to fall in love with the daughters of their best customers.

SIR DEN. Eh? . . . Now, where have I heard that before? . . . Somebody said it.

SMITH. It's not a very original thought, Sir Dennys. It's just sheer common sense.

SIR DEN. (*Much relieved*) I'm glad to know that you take such a right view of it.

SMITH. I can quite appreciate your position in the matter. Had I been in your place I should have been exceedingly annoyed to learn that my daughter had been going about with my tailor.

SIR DEN. Then why on earth did you do it?

SMITH. Because I lacked the courage of my convictions. Apart from the fact that it would have been most ungallant of me to decline to act as Miss Broughton's escort, I was naturally flattered by her request, and I didn't pause to consider the consequences.

SIR DEN. Ah!

SMITH. You see, Sir Dennys, it would cause you annoyance, no doubt, if this story got about—but it would spell disaster for me.

SIR DEN. (*Amazed*) Eh?

SMITH. I should lose all my custom. I might as well shut up shop. Nobody's going to employ

a tailor who's got a reputation for—well, for forgetting his place.

SIR DEN. By George! I—I never thought of that side of it.

SMITH. It wouldn't be likely to occur to you.

SIR DEN. And so—er—to avoid temptation you arranged to leave Sheffingham?

SMITH. That's the long and the short of it.

SIR DEN. (*Warmly*) Well, I admire you, Smith! 'Pon my word, I do! I respect you. But, happily, there'll be no necessity for you to go now.

SMITH. I'm afraid I must.

SIR DEN. There's no "must" about it. My daughter is going abroad for some time—and that solves your difficulty.

SMITH. Not quite, Sir Dennys. You see I have made arrangements with my brother to take over the control of our London house, and for him to take my place here.

SIR DEN. Well, cancel 'em.

SMITH. It's rather too late to do that. He's got rid of the house he had in London, and has taken one in Sheffingham—and, altogether—well, I couldn't possibly ask him to change his plans again.

SIR DEN. But it'll be so deucedly inconvenient for me!—and for many other people. (*He adds this as an afterthought*) We've got used to you, Smith. We like you. And, as I've said before, I can't stand change.

SMITH. I'm much obliged to you, Sir Dennys—but you'll find my brother an excellent man in every way.

SIR DEN. Ah, well, if it's got to be it's got to be, I suppose. I'm very sorry, but there it is, and—I'm sure I wish you luck.

He holds out his hand to SMITH, who shakes it.

SMITH. Thank you, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. If you'll be guided by me you'll drop all that Territorial business when you get to London. You'll find it won't do you any good.

SMITH. (*Laughing*) Well, we shall see.

SIR DEN. You'll have a biscuit and a glass of wine before you go.

SMITH. Thank you very much.

SIR DEN. I'll tell Wilson to bring it in to you.

He turns to go, and then suddenly recollects a question he has forgotten to put to SMITH.

Oh, by the way, Smith, who's er—um—er—Nietzschmann?

SMITH. (*Momentarily nonplussed*) Nietzschmann, Sir Dennys? (*He pauses for reflection*) Oh, yes, I know the man. He's a hairdresser—a German—has a little shop somewhere off the High Street.

SIR DEN. (*More to himself than to anybody else*) Then, what on earth could Betty have meant by——?

SMITH. I beg your pardon, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. Oh, nothing, nothing. It doesn't matter. (*He proceeds to the door*) Well, good-bye to you, Smith, and good luck.

SMITH. Good-day, Sir Dennys. Thank you.

SIR DENNYS goes out. *A portrait of BETTY which is upon the mantelshelf catches SMITH'S eye. He takes it down, and gazes upon it longingly. A sigh escapes him.*

(*Addressing the portrait*) Oh, why weren't you born the daughter of a tradesman?

BETTY appears at the window.

SMITH stands with his back to the window. *Having satisfied herself that he is alone in the room, BETTY whistles softly.*

BETTY. Fee—fo!

SMITH *makes haste to set the portrait down, and turns to greet her.*

SMITH. Ah, Miss Broughton! How are you this morning?

BETTY. (*Disregarding his enquiry*) Well?

SMITH. Quite, thank you!

BETTY. No, no; don't make fun of me! What's he said?

SMITH. Your father?

BETTY. Yes.

SMITH. Oh, lots of things.

BETTY. I mean about us. There's been an awful row, you know!

SMITH. I'm sorry to hear that.

BETTY. Was he very rude to you?

SMITH. Good gracious, no! Why should he be?

BETTY. I don't know. I was thinking of what you said to me the other day.

SMITH. What did I say?

BETTY. That everybody has such perfect manners nowadays that the only way people can show that they've got blue blood in their veins is by being rude to those that they know haven't.

SMITH. That doesn't apply to your father.

BETTY. (*A shade indignantly*) He's got lots of blue blood!

SMITH. I didn't mean in that sense. Your father is always polite.

BETTY. Oh, is he? You should hear him talking to me!

SMITH. Politeness is a relative term.

BETTY. That's just what it isn't!

SMITH. (*Laughing*) You're too quick for me, Miss Broughton.

BETTY. Didn't he say *anything* to you, then?

SMITH. Oh, yes. . . . He told me that you're going abroad very soon.

BETTY. (*Mightily surprised*) Did he, indeed!

SMITH. (*Surprised in his turn*) Aren't you?

BETTY. It's the first I've heard of it.

SMITH. Oh, then, p'raps I've said the wrong thing.

BETTY. Not at all. . . . It's always interesting to be told what one's going to do! . . . What did you say to that?

SMITH. I think I said—er—"That's rather funny!"

BETTY. I don't see anything funny in it! Why is it funny?

SMITH. Because I'm going to leave Sheffingham, too.

BETTY. You! . . . Why?

SMITH. We're making some changes in our staff. I'm going to take over the management of our London house.

BETTY. You never told me anything about it on Wednesday.

SMITH. I didn't think it would interest you.

BETTY. That isn't true!

SMITH. (*Uncomfortably*) Believe me——

BETTY. Neither is the reason that you've given me for going to London.

SMITH. Miss Broughton, I——

BETTY. You're leaving Sheffingham because of me!

SMITH. But——

BETTY. It's not a bit of good denying it. It is so, isn't it?

SMITH. Please don't let's discuss it. It places me in such an awkward position.

BETTY. My people are going to hound you out of your own town!

SMITH. No! No!

BETTY. They're trying to! But I'm not going to let that happen, unless——

SMITH. (*Unable to resist his curiosity*) Yes?

BETTY. Unless you take me with you!

A little groan escapes SMITH's lips.

BETTY, *having made her confession, is overcome by a sense of modesty outraged, and hangs her head. There is a considerable pause.*

SMITH. Miss Broughton, I—I beg your pardon. I never ought to have let you say that.

BETTY. You couldn't have stopped me.

SMITH. Yes, I could.

BETTY. How?

SMITH. By being absolutely frank with you. . . . That's what I've got to be now.

BETTY. I don't understand.

SMITH. I'll try to explain. . . . Far from wanting to hound me out of the town, as you put it, your father did his utmost to persuade me to remain.

BETTY. Father did?

SMITH. Yes. I must tell you that in fairness to him. But it was too late to change my plans. Besides— (*He hesitates*)

BETTY. Yes?

SMITH. I couldn't have remained in the town if you'd left it, and I daren't have remained if you'd stayed.

BETTY. Daren't . . . Why not?

SMITH. Because I should have lived in constant fear of—what has just happened.

BETTY. (*Painfully*) You mean—you don't love me?

SMITH. (*Genuinely distressed*) Please! Please! I mustn't answer that question.

BETTY. I can't see any other explanation.

SMITH. We could never have been married—you and I. It would have meant misery for you and ruin for me.

BETTY. (*Bitterly*) Oh, of course, if I should have ruined you——!

SMITH. Oh, don't misunderstand me! The man who means to be successful in trade must have only one motto:

“Lord, keep us in our proper stations,
And bless the Squire and his relations!”

Once he forgets that—well, the squire and his relations soon forget him!

BETTY. You needn't be brutal!

SMITH. I've got to be brutal! I've got to make you understand!

BETTY. But surely I'm the best judge of whether I should have been miserable or not?

SMITH. No, you're not! You've only seen me with my Sunday clothes and my party manners on. You've never thought of me as Smith the tailor, but as Mister Smith, the dabbler in philosophy—Heaven help me! You belong to one class, I to another—and the gulf between us couldn't be much greater if I were a Chinee! We have a totally separate code of traditions, of customs, and of habits of life. I don't mean to say that I eat peas with my knife or drink out of my saucer—but I do lots of things that would jar upon you just as badly. You wouldn't understand why I did them, and I shouldn't understand why you objected to my doing them. And the result would be— (*He shrugs his shoulders eloquently*) How would you feel, for instance, when you saw me like this?—as you'd have to every day.

He goes over to his handbag and takes out of it a handful of pins, a piece of chalk, and a

tape measure. The measure he hangs about his neck, the chalk he places behind his ear, and the pins he sticks into the lapel of his uniform. He proceeds to address an imaginary customer entering his shop:—

SMITH. Ah, good morning, Mr Jones . . . Nice morning, isn't it? . . . Yes, your suit's quite ready to be fitted . . . Will you step this way? . . . Ah, that's a beautiful back—couldn't be better—but I think it would be as well if we let it out a trifle over the shoulders. (*He takes the chalk from behind his ear, and makes some imaginary marks in the air*) And now for the sleeves—are they quite comfortable?

BETTY. (*Very near to tears*) Oh, don't! Don't!

SMITH. Why not?

BETTY. You're making yourself so horribly common!

SMITH. I *am* common!

BETTY. You're not! You're doing this just to—to put me off! And, anyhow, I don't care if you are. If there is any risk I'll take it—for I love you, I love you, I love you!

She goes up to him with outstretched arms.

SMITH *wavers.*

Her arms are very nearly about his neck when the latch of the door clicks, heralding the advent of a third person.

BETTY *looks startled and alarmed. Her breath comes quickly. Hurriedly she breaks into speech.*

WILSON *enters, carrying a tray upon which are a decanter of sherry and a wine-glass, a dish of biscuits and a plate.*

BETTY. I'd like the habit to fit well in at the waist Mr Smith, and to be fairly full in the skirt.

SMITH. (*Quite gravely*) Certainly, Miss. It shall have my personal attention.

BETTY. What is it, Wilson?

WILSON. Beg pardon, Miss, but Sir Dennys told me to bring these in for the—er—for Mr Smith.

He goes out.

There is a considerable and uncomfortable pause. It is clear to the audience that SMITH is sorely hurt, but he takes great care that this shall not be evident to BETTY. She avoids meeting his eye. SMITH goes over to the table upon which WILSON has placed the tray, and pours out a glass of sherry. Then he speaks quite lightly.

SMITH. I'm really very much obliged to Wilson.

BETTY. (*In a voice hardly above a whisper*) Why?

SMITH. He has proved my point for me so much more neatly than ever I could have done!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

The Scene is the same as that of the previous Act, and save in a few minor details—such, for instance, as the re-covering of the chairs with new cretonnes—the passage of four years has brought little alteration to the morning-room of Grange Court. The month is February, and the bowls and vases of summer flowers that decorated the room in the First Act have given place to pots of hyacinths and daffodils, and to vases of freesia and mimosa. A fire of logs is burning brightly on the hearth.

As with the room, so also with those who are accustomed to occupy it. With the exception of BETTY, they remain essentially the same—in character and in appearance—as they were four years ago. The progress of events has necessitated a shifting of their view-point here and there, but that is all. In the case of SIR DENNYS, it has compelled a complete reversal of many of his pet convictions, but the process has been accomplished without vexation by the simple expedient of accepting things as they are and of refusing to acknowledge that he was ever of a contrary opinion.

It is in BETTY, however, that the most notable change is apparent. In four years—three of which she has spent in Germany—she has developed from a love-sick and rebellious girl into the semblance of a cynical and flippant woman, possessed of little affection and of no ideals. This is, in point of fact, a pose ; but it is well-sustained and is suc-

cessful in deceiving most people, BETTY herself included. When, upon the advice of ALEC, BETTY was "packed off" to Germany, she departed a prey to various emotions, seemingly diverse but all centring about SMITH. The manner of her parting from him and his rejection of her advances had filled her with a spirit of revolt against him and against herself. Whilst unwilling and unable to abate a jot of her affection for him, she had been consumed by a passionate desire to retaliate for the "humiliation" that he had put upon her. She had wanted to "hit back"—to hurt him. She had wanted to bring him to his knees before her, and then, graciously, to pardon him. This had been made impossible, and so, a stranger in a strange land, deprived of all opportunity of achieving her heart's desire, she had brooded upon her "troubles" until she had lost all sense of proportion. It had been easy to persuade herself that SMITH despised her, and the thought that she had made herself "cheap" in the sight of a man so much her social inferior as her father's tailor had tormented her perpetually. She had striven hard to bring herself to hate all recollection of the man, and, failing, had despised herself for her inability to free herself from the trammels of a passion which (she had brought herself to believe) was utterly degrading. In order to banish remembrance from her mind, she had flung herself, with a feverish zest, into participation in any amusement that offered. The ambitions that once obsessed her had been flung aside—their pursuit could serve only to remind her of him. And so, gradually, there had grown up the artificial woman that conceals the real BETTY at the opening of the Second Act. Her affection for, and her animosity against SMITH have lost

some part of their first fierce intensity, but they remain within her, and await only opportunity to revive their ardour.

When the curtain rises upon the Second Act, SIR DENNYS is alone upon the stage. He is attired in the uniform of a private of the National Reserve, and wears the scarlet brassard, stamped with the royal initials, "G. R." Propped up on the mantel-piece before him is the maroon-covered manual upon "Infantry Training—1914," and, with the aid of a golf club in lieu of a rifle, he is endeavouring to master the intricacies of the several motions requisite in "presenting arms."

LADY BROUGHTON *enters, wearing heavy furs. She is going out in the car.*

BETTY *follows her into the room.*

LADY B. Oh! So your uniform's come.

BETTY. My word! Now we're the real thing, and no mistake! Turn round, Father, and let's have a look at you.

SIR DEN. I haven't got quite used to it yet. I'm just trying to break it in. 'S matter o' fact, I'm just a bit nervous about it. It feels — well, I'm not at all sure what'll happen when I try to touch my toes!

LADY B. Touch your toes! What d'you want to touch your toes for?

SIR DEN. I don't, but I have to! It's part of the drill, you know—Swedish exercises, and that sort o' thing.

BETTY. I know. I've heard 'em at it. (*She mimics the voice and manner of a drill sergeant*) "On the commawnd ONE, plice the 'ands on the 'ips!" Poor old Father!

LADY B. (*Scandalized*) You don't mean to tell me that you—you actually make the endeavour to touch your toes in public!

SIR DEN. (*None too comfortable*) Um—er—yes.

LADY B. How extremely undignified!

SIR DEN. My dear Marian, if it is necessary for me to lose my dignity in the service of my country, I am proud to do so.

BETTY. (*Flippantly*) To-day's great thought!

LADY B. I fail to see how you will benefit your country by making yourself ridiculous. Your attempts to touch your toes aren't going to drive the Germans out of France.

SIR DEN. (*A shade warmly*) Nobody ever expected that they were!

BETTY. Now, now, Father! No naughty temper!

SIR DEN. Your mother is taking a very wrong view of the position. As a private in the National Reserve, I have to conform to the rules and regulations laid down for the training of the forces in general.

LADY B. That's nonsense, Dennys! You're not an ordinary private. You know perfectly well that nobody would say a word to you if you refused to do these preposterous things.

SIR DEN. I've got to set the rest of the corps a good example. I should be failing most grossly in my duty if I were to take advantage of my social position in order to avoid certain—er—unpleasant tasks.

BETTY. (*Mockingly*) Hear! Hear!

LADY B. All the same, I don't see any sense in trying to make a man of your age and your figure touch his toes. It's not only undignified, it's dangerous. You might very easily injure your back for life.

BETTY. And you'll certainly burst the buttons off your tunic!

SIR DEN. Quiet, you minx! . . . I will not be talked to as though I were a crocketty old man! The exercises are doing me all the good in the world. I've lost several pounds since I began 'em; and I never felt fitter in my life.

LADY B. Yes, dear, but—well, don't overdo it. That's all I'm anxious about. You can't afford to play pranks with yourself at your age, you know.

BETTY. (*Who has caught sight suddenly of SIR DENNYS' "rifle"*) Hello! What's the golf club doing here? I thought all that sort of thing had been put away for the duration of the war. (*With mock gravity*) Have you been backsliding, Father?

SIR DEN. Certainly not! That's my rifle. I've just been practising the "Present!" It's a most deucedly tricky movement—and I'm particularly anxious to have it right this afternoon.

BETTY. Will the sergeant be very rude to you if you don't?

SIR DEN. I've no doubt he would be if—er—well, you see, it's a very difficult position for him, poor chap. Seeing that I am—well, who I am—he can't very well be as—er—frank with me as he would be with the ordinary recruit.

LADY B. Who is the sergeant? Do I know him?

SIR DEN. Yes. It's young Johnson—son of old Mrs Johnson at the lodge.

BETTY. Our lodge?

SIR DENNYS *nods*.

LADY B. You don't mean the man who helps in the stables?

SIR DEN. Yes. He's a good feller—capital soldier—used to be a corporal in the Guards.

LADY B. And you have to do what he tells you?

Again SIR DENNYS nods.

Well, I never heard such a thing!

BETTY. (*Laughing in high delight*) I think it's lovely!

LADY B. I hope he won't take advantage of it.

BETTY. He's a silly fellow if he doesn't.

SIR DEN. (*Startled*) Eh?

BETTY. If I were in his place, I should draw my wages regularly, and never do another stroke of work!

SIR DEN. In which case, my dear, you wouldn't draw your wages. You'd get the sack.

BETTY. Oh no, I shouldn't. You daren't sack me!—you know you daren't! Think of the time I should give you on parade afterwards if you did!

SIR DEN. (*Genuinely perturbed*) Sh, sh, my dear! You mustn't say that sort of thing even in fun. If one of the servants happened to overhear you, they might take it quite seriously, and that would make things extremely awkward—impossible, in fact!

LADY B. (*Emphatically*) Quite impossible! . . . Really, it's very difficult to know where one stands nowadays. Everything seems turned topsy-turvy. It's worse than Alice through the looking-glass.

BETTY. It's like one of our old nursery games on a big scale. The Kaiser's shouted "General Post!"—and we've all changed places.

SIR DEN. It's merely a question of the trained man and the untrained. Naturally, the trained man has the pull.

LADY B. But what's going to happen afterwards?

What's going to happen when the war's over?
Will things go back to what they used to be?

SIR DEN. My dear, that's more than I can tell you.
But they'll shake down all right. It's a way things
have.

*The distant tinkle of a bell arrests his attention.
He cocks his head and listens.*

That the telephone?

*They all keep silence for a moment. The bell
continues to ring.*

BETTY. Sounds like a trunk-call.

LADY B. It may be Alec.

BETTY. Shall I go and see?

LADY B. I wish you would, dear. If it is Alec, I'll
come.

BETTY. All right.

She goes out.

SIR DEN. Have you heard from the boy?

LADY B. Not since the telegram last week that you
saw.

SIR DEN. Then you don't know yet what regiment
he's in?

LADY B. No. He just said he'd been gazetted—
and that was all. I couldn't find any mention of
it in the paper. I've been expecting a letter from
him every day.

SIR DEN. He won't have any time to waste in
writing letters. There's no playing at soldiering
nowadays, you know. The lads are kept hard at
it from the moment they join. If we're going to
teach the Germans a lesson, we've got to put our
backs into it.

LADY B. Still, dear, surely he could have found time
to send a post-card?

SIR DEN. Perhaps, perhaps; but—er—we must make allowances.

LADY B. A mother's used to doing that!

SIR DEN. And so's a father, by Jove! Which reminds me that I must send the young rascal a cheque.

He seats himself at the writing-desk, and proceeds to suit the action to the word.

LADY B. You might draw one for Betty at the same time. . . . I wonder what she's doing. It can't have been Alec ringing up or she'd have come and told us.

SIR DEN. My word, Marian, how that girl has altered.

LADY B. Betty?

SIR DEN. Yes. . . . You know, my dear, if it didn't sound so abominably disloyal, I should say that you and I ought to be very grateful to the Germans!

LADY B. You mean for the change they've made in her.

SIR DEN. Yes.

LADY B. (*With a half sigh*) She certainly *has* changed.

SIR DEN. Why do you say it like that? Don't you think that she's improved?

LADY B. In some ways.

SIR DEN. In every way! . . . There's nothing of the Socialist about Betty now. You wouldn't find her walking arm-in-arm with a tailor these days.

LADY B. She's older than she was.

SIR DEN. People don't necessarily grow wiser as they grow older. No; it's something else. Her three years in Germany have made a different girl of her. She's improved out of all knowledge.

LADY B. Yes, I suppose she has improved; but I'm not a bit happy about her.

SIR DEN. Not happy about her? Why?

LADY B. She's not happy herself.

SIR DEN. What on earth makes you say that?

LADY B. Lots of little things. I'm sure of it.

SIR DEN. But she's the life and soul of every place she goes to! You should have seen her at the Veritys' the other night. She kept the whole table in an uproar. Most amusing the things she said.

LADY B. Oh, she can be amusing enough when there are people about. But have you ever watched her when she's not known that you've been looking at her?

SIR DEN. I don't know that I have. Why?

LADY B. It's not the face of a happy woman that she shows then.

SIR DEN. On the occasions that you refer to, she's probably been tired.

LADY B. She has been—tired of pretending.

SIR DEN. Pretending? Pretending what?

LADY B. That she's happy. She isn't, Dennys. At the back of Betty's mind there's always something that—that's perpetually tormenting her. I don't know what it is; but it's there. I'm sure of it.

SIR DEN. I'm bound to say I haven't noticed it.

LADY B. But, then, you're not a very observant person, are you?

SIR DEN. (*None too well pleased*) I don't know—I——

LADY B. Besides, dear, it's sufficient for you that she makes you laugh. It's probably never struck you that the things she makes most fun of are the things that a girl of her age ought to hold dear.

SIR DEN. She sees the humorous side of everything. Can't help it. Takes after me.

LADY B. You're not cynical, and you're not bitter. Betty's both. That's what makes me so worried about her. She seems to have no heart.

SIR DEN. You're disturbing me very much. I—I'd no idea that—er—what d'you think's the matter with her?

LADY B. I don't know, and it's very difficult to find out, because—well, you see, she won't confide in me. But I've often wondered if she ever got over that affair with——

SIR DEN. With whom?

LADY B. With that man in Sheffingham.

SIR DEN. Sheffingham? You—you don't mean Smith?

LADY B. Yes.

SIR DEN. But that was years ago!—and—oh, I'm sure you're mistaken. So far as I know, she's never mentioned it from that moment to this.

LADY B. That's one of the very reasons that I'm so afraid.

SIR DEN. But she was little more than a child then. She——

LADY B. She was just at an age when that sort of thing makes its most vivid impression. . . . We acted for the best, Dennys, I know. But I'm not at all sure that we acted wisely.

BETTY *returns.*

SIR DENNYS *turns to her, promptly affecting his most cheery manner—the better to conceal his disquietude—and rather over-doing it.*

SIR DEN. Ah! So it wasn't Alec, eh?

BETTY. Yes, it was.

LADY B. Then why didn't you come and tell me, dear? He hasn't rung off, has he?

BETTY. Yes.

LADY B. Oh!

BETTY. But he'll be here in a minute.

SIR DEN. Here? . . . Where was he ringing up from, then?

BETTY. From Occlesham.

LADY B. Only three miles away?

BETTY. Yes. He tried to get through before, but couldn't. He's got two or three days' leave, so he's come down in the car. He's got somebody with him—his C.O. I think he said.

LADY B. Now, isn't that vexing? I shall be out when they arrive.

SIR DEN. Where're you off to?

LADY B. Committee-meeting—housing of refugees.

SIR DEN. Can't you keep 'em waiting for a minute or two?

LADY B. (*Glancing at the watch on her wrist*) I shall be late as it is—and they can't do anything without me because I've got all the particulars. No, I simply must go.

WILSON *enters*.

WILSON. The car is at the door, m'lady.

LADY B. Oh . . . (*She turns to BETTY*) Well, give Alec my love, dear, and tell him how sorry I am not to be at home when he arrives. . . . Is his Colonel going to stay?

BETTY. I don't know—he didn't say.

LADY B. Well, find out, dear, and make the necessary arrangements if he is. I'll get back as soon as ever I can.

She goes out.

There is a slight pause during which SIR DENNYs casts about in his mind for the best way in which to open the subject he desires to discuss with his daughter. Eventually he says:—

SIR DEN. Is your mother quite well?

BETTY. So far as I know. Why?

SIR DEN. Oh, I don't know. She—she seemed a little worried and depressed.

BETTY. I think she's worried about Alec. She doesn't like the idea of him going to the Front.

SIR DEN. Ah! . . . Talking about going to the Front, have you ever heard what became of that fellow—er—Smith?

BETTY does not reply immediately. She looks at her father narrowly, in the endeavour to discern how much of guile there is concealed in his question. Eventually she answers him quietly:—

BETTY. You mean the man who used to be a tailor in Sheffingham?—the man I made such a fool of myself over?

SIR DEN. Well—er—if you like to put it that way, my dear. He used to be quite a big pot in the Territorials here, if I remember rightly. I wondered if you knew what he was doing.

BETTY. I've no idea. How should I?

SIR DEN. I don't know. I thought you might have heard in a roundabout way.

BETTY. I'm afraid I've not been sufficiently interested to inquire.

SIR DEN. (*With ponderous jocularity*) There was a time——!

BETTY. What are you driving at, Father? Has Mr Smith come back to Sheffingham?

SIR DEN. Not so far as I'm aware. I only wish he had done. His brother's not a patch on him. This tunic's a positive disgrace. Look at it! I've just telephoned for *him* to come and look at it. *Edward* Smith would never have allowed a thing like that to leave his workshop.

BETTY. (*Meditatively*) H'm. . . . You know, I should love to meet Mr Smith again. I should love to see what it is in him that made me make such a hopeless little idiot of myself.

SIR DENNYS *grunts*. BETTY *continues* :—

I was dreadfully in love with him, you know. You none of you believed it, but I was. I wonder if I should fall in love with him again.

SIR DEN. (*Fervently*) Heaven forbid ! . . . You're not—er—not feeling inclined that way, I hope.

BETTY. (*Laughing*) No. I—I'm quite heart-whole at the moment.

SIR DEN. (*Incautiously triumphant*) I felt sure I was right !

BETTY. Right ? . . . Look here, Father, have you been discussing me with somebody ?

SIR DEN. (*A shade uncomfortably*) No, my dear, no ! . . . The—er—the subject just happened to crop up in conversation with your mother. She's got an idea into her head that—that you're not happy.

BETTY. (*Unconvincingly*) That's nonsense ! I—I'm perfectly happy.

SIR DEN. Of course ! Of course !

The raucous scream of a motor-horn fitted to the exhaust of a car penetrates into the room.

Hullo ! That sounds like Alec !

BETTY. It is. I should know that horrible old screecher of his anywhere.

SIR DEN. Well, I'd better be off and change. I don't want to be caught like this.

BETTY. Why not ?

SIR DEN. I should have to stand at attention the whole time—presence of my superior officer. And I'm hanged if I'm going to salute my own son !

BETTY. Would you have to?

SIR DEN. Of course I should.

BETTY. (*Laughing*) That's rather nice!

ALEC's voice is heard outside in conversation with WILSON, inquiring the whereabouts of "everybody."

(*Gleefully*) You're too late now! You're caught!
SIR DEN. Confound!

ALEC bursts cheerily into the room. He wears the khaki uniform of a 2nd Lieutenant. He is the picture of good health, bronzed and upright, and has grown a little moustache.

ALEC. Hello! (*He kisses his sister*) How are you, old girl? Fit?

BETTY. Quite.

ALEC. That's right. . . . And you, Pater?

SIR DEN. First-class, my boy, thanks. (*They shake hands*) Very pleased to see you.

ALEC. (*Eying his father's uniform*) Hullo! What's this mean?

SIR DEN. I've joined the Volunteers. Tried to set an example to the slackers round here. We've far too many of 'em.

ALEC. Well done, Pater! . . . A private, eh?

SIR DEN. You needn't think I'm going to salute you!

ALEC. You're not required to salute without your cap!

SIR DEN. Shouldn't do it even if I had it on!

ALEC. Then I should have to report you to your commandant, or whatever you call him—and you'd be severely reprimanded!

SIR DEN. Should I?

ALEC. A second offence would mean two or three days' "C.B."

BETTY. C.P.? What's that?—Corporal punishment?

ALEC. (*Laughing*) No! "C.B."!—Confined to barracks!

SIR DEN. Haven't got any barracks!

ALEC. Then we should have to lock you up in your bedroom; that's all! . . . Where's the Mater?

BETTY. She's had to go out to some meeting. Awfully sorry not to be here when you arrived. But she left her love, and said she'd get back as soon as she could.

ALEC. Good!

SIR DEN. And now, look here, young man! Are you aware that you've never told us what your regiment is?

ALEC. Haven't I?

BETTY. The badge looks like the Fusiliers.

ALEC. That's right. It is—38th County of London. They're a fine lot.

SIR DEN. Territorials?

ALEC. Yes.

SIR DEN. Ah! I'm glad you've joined a Territorial regiment. Wonderful the way those chaps have acquitted themselves at the front! Wonderful! It's been very gratifying to those of us who've always believed in 'em to find our faith so—er—so amply justified.

ALEC's lips twitch with amusement. He looks queerly at his sister.

You've a nice set of officers, eh?

ALEC. Splendid fellows. The Colonel's a fine chap, and a wonderful soldier.

BETTY. Where is he? I thought you said he was coming down with you?

ALEC. So he has done. I left him in the drive, talking to old Dr Cundall.

SIR DEN. He knows Cundall, eh?

ALEC. Yes. As a matter of fact, he knows several people down here.

SIR DEN. Oh. . . . Have I ever met him?

ALEC. I think so.

SIR DEN. What's his name?

ALEC. Smith.

BETTY starts at the sound of the name, and looks intently at her brother.

SIR DEN. Smith? Smith? I don't seem to remember meeting any Colonel Smith.

BETTY. (*With an excitement she cannot restrain*) Alec, it isn't——?

SIR DEN. Who?

BETTY. (*Seeing from her brother's expression that it is*) Well, how extraordinary!

The humour of the situation overcomes her. She cannot refrain from laughing.

Really, it's too funny! It's funnier than you and the stableman, Father!

SIR DEN. What on earth d'you mean. I don't understand. What's all this mystery about?

BETTY. Don't you see? . . . Why, it's the man we've just been talking about!—the man who used to be your tailor!

SIR DEN. (*Incredulous, but horrified by the bare suggestion*) What! Nonsense!

Follows a pause of consternation. ALEC's silence gives consent to BETTY's statement. Still hoping against hope, SIR DENNY'S continues apprehensively:—

You—you don't mean to tell me that that's so, Alec?

ALEC. (*On the defensive immediately*) I believe he was something of the sort at one time, but I really can't see——

SIR DEN. What?

ALEC. What difference that makes.

SIR DEN. (*Astounded*) You can't see?—What's happened to you, my boy? I should have thought that you'd have been the very first to see that the whole thing's impossible!

BETTY. (*Intensely amused—mockingly*) A soldier has no such word in his dictionary!

SIR DEN. There's only one thing for it. You must exchange at once!

ALEC. Exchange? . . . My dear Father! Really!

SIR DEN. It's a recognized thing in the army.

ALEC. Not at a time like this. Besides, it's a jolly fine regiment, and I'm proud to belong to it.

SIR DEN. There are plenty of other regiments just as fine without the disadvantage of having a tailor for their Colonel.

ALEC. Why should that be a disadvantage?

SIR DEN. You wouldn't call it an advantage, would you? Hang it all, I should have thought you'd have felt a certain diffidence in saluting a man and calling him "Sir" one minute, and the next going into his shop and cursing him for having cut your breeches badly!

BETTY. (*Laughing delightedly*) What a delicious idea!

SIR DEN. It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been one's own tailor. As it is, it'll be all over the place in five minutes, and—dash it!—one doesn't like to be made to feel a fool!

ALEC. Why should you feel a fool? I should have thought that you'd have been the last person, Pater, to allow yourself to be influenced by local gossip.

SIR DEN. So I am! But, when one occupies a certain position in a place, one's bound to consider these things. Besides, it's more of your mother that I was thinking. You know how women look upon these matters, and——

BETTY. Oh, you Adam, Father!

SIR DEN. I'm dashed if I understand the way the War Office is going to work. Why on earth do they want to make a man like Smith a Colonel?

ALEC. Because he's the best man for the job. Because he knows his soldiering backwards—as you, and I, and lots of others like us ought to have done, and would have done if we hadn't been such fools! We scoffed at the idea of war with Germany. He saw it coming, and, whilst we slacked, he worked, worked hard to be ready for the day when it came. We laughed at the Territorials. We don't laugh now! If it hadn't been for them, where should we be to-day?—jolly well in the soup!

SIR DEN. Yes, yes, my boy! I admit all that—but still, a tailor——!

ALEC. What's that to do with it, Father?—so long as he knows how to command a regiment? Family-trees are played out. The man who's top-dog to-day is the man who can *do* things. Nothing else counts.

SIR DEN. All the same, I don't think you need have brought him down here!

ALEC. He had to come down on business.

SIR DEN. But why bring him to the house? You don't seem to realize that by doing so you place both him and us in a very false position.

ALEC. In what way?

SIR DEN. Well—dash it!—you can't expect your mother and your sister to meet him on terms of equality.

ALEC. My dear Father! You're a private; I'm a subaltern. It seems to me the question is, will he consent to meet us on terms of equality.

SIR DEN. 'Pon my word, I——!

BETTY. General Post! . . . Come on, Father, you must play the game!

SIR DEN. Well, it's all very upsetting! It's most upsetting! His brother's coming here this morning to see about altering my uniform. They'll meet. Then what're we going to do? Ask him to bring his tape-measure into lunch? . . . Upon my word, it's—well, I don't know what your mother'll have to say, I don't indeed!

BETTY. Let's hope she sees the funny side of it.

She moves over to the window and looks out.

SIR DEN. (*Grimly*) H'm! I shouldn't pin my hopes on that, Betty, if I were you.

BETTY. Here is Mister—I mean the Colonel!—coming up the drive.

SIR DEN. Oh, well, in for a penny, in for a pound, I suppose. . . . What do I do, Alec? Come to attention?

ALEC. No, just behave as you would do ordinarily.

SIR DEN. No, no, no! I like to do things properly. Now, how's that?

He comes to attention after the style approved by the drill sergeant.

ALEC. It's all right—but don't make him feel uncomfortable, Pater.

WILSON *throws the door open and announces*:—

WILSON. Colonel Smith.

EDWARD SMITH *enters*. *He is in khaki—field-service—uniform and carries the badge of his rank upon his sleeve. ALEC goes forward to greet him.*

ALEC. Ah, there you are, sir. Come in.

SMITH. Awfully sorry to have been so long, Broughton, but the old doctor's full of some scheme he's got for ending the war in a week, and—er—(*He catches sight of BETTY*) Oh, pardon me, I didn't see that——

ALEC. I think you know my sister, don't you?

SMITH. (*A little awkwardly*) Why—yes—I—
(*He goes up to her with outstretched hand*) How
do you do, Miss Broughton? It's very nice to see
you again after all these years.

BETTY. It's very charming of you to say so—Colonel!

She lays an amused stress upon his title.

ALEC. And—er—my father?

SMITH. (*Turning to greet him*) Ah, Sir Dennys!
(*He observes his uniform—to ALEC*) Why, you
never told me, Broughton, that your father had
joined the forces, too!

ALEC. I didn't know anything at all about it until
just now.

SMITH. Well, I think it's fine of you, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. I'm only a Tommy, you know, Smith—
er—that is—er—sir!

SMITH. That makes it all the finer. By Jove, if the
sight of you in khaki doesn't shame the shirkers
into action, nothing will!

SIR DEN. It isn't exactly khaki, you know, Smith
—dash it all! Sir, I mean!—I'm only a
Volunteer.

SMITH. Why "only," Sir Dennys? You've signified
your willingness to fight if your country needs you.
You can't do more.

SIR DEN. No, no! I wish to goodness I could.

BETTY. Poor father! You do look so uncomfortable,
standing as if you'd swallowed the poker. (*She
turns to SMITH*) Please tell him to stand at ease,
Colonel.

SMITH. (*Laughing*) Do you allow them to chaff
you like that, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. Of course, it's not my place to make
suggestions to you, sir, but—oughtn't you to call
me Private Broughton.

SMITH. (*Still laughing—though now a trifle uncom-*

fortably) It's too bad of you to make fun of me, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. No, no, I'm quite serious. I mean we're both in uniform, and—er—I like to do these things properly, you know.

SMITH. Oh, we keep formalities for the parade-ground nowadays. We've got to. The new army's conducted on strictly democratic principles. Why, any day of the week, you may see Tommies dining at the Carlton whilst their officers feed at—er——

BETTY. (*Mischievously*) Lockharts?

SMITH. (*Laughing*) Well, not quite! One can live in a Palace in London, you know, for six shillings a day, inclusive—and no tips!

BETTY. That's what Alec calls being Strand-ed in town!

SMITH *makes a wry face.*

SMITH. I should make him put half-a-crown in the poor box for that!

ALEC. It is pretty bad, isn't it? . . . But, as you were saying, sir, it is most awfully comic the way the war's turned things topsy-turvy. One finds peers in the ranks, and—er——

SMITH. (*Smiling*) And tailors in command, eh?

ALEC. (*Uncomfortably*) Oh I didn't mean—er——

SMITH. I know you didn't. But it's none the less a fact.

SIR DEN. Exactly! Exactly!—And what's the explanation of it? Why, merely that the men who were long-sighted enough to foresee this terrible calamity that has come upon us, and patriotic enough to prepare themselves to cope with it, are reaping their reward. And richly they deserve it! In the light of what has happened, it's hardly possible to credit that there should have been people who did their utmost to discourage the Territorial movement—worse still, people who laughed at it! Those people must be feeling pretty foolish

now! Where should we have been but for the Territorials, I should like to know?

BETTY. (*Rushing gallantly, if flippantly, to the rescue of SMITH and ALEC, neither of whom dare speak for fear of revealing the amusement which SIR DENNY'S volte face affords them*) Mere bits of toast in the consommé! . . . That's the conclusion that you came to, wasn't it, Alec?

SIR DEN. Eh?

BETTY. You're rather a lamb, Father, aren't you?

SIR DEN. What on earth d'you mean?—lamb! Of all the silly phrases, that's the silliest! Do I resemble a lamb in the very least? Well-seasoned mutton's more my mark!

SMITH. And pretty tough, Sir Dennys, from the look of you!

SIR DEN. (*Well pleased*) Tough enough to march some of these youngsters off their feet! I can manage my fifteen miles without turning a hair.

SMITH. Splendid!

ALEC. I say! Is there any reason why we shouldn't sit down?

SIR DEN. None at all—none at all! I should have suggested it before, but I didn't quite like to in the presence of my superior officers. However, since we have Colonel Smith's assurance that he has no objection to—er—to—er——

SMITH. Very much the contrary.

SIR DEN. Then sit down, Smith, sit down.

They all seat themselves.

Now tell me, any news in town this morning? I haven't seen the paper yet. What's the latest from Gallipoli?

SMITH. Nothing very encouraging. We don't seem to get any "forrader."

ALEC. They're waiting for us to get out there.

BETTY. Oh, you're going to Gallipoli, are you? It's settled?

SMITH. Not settled, Miss Broughton, but—it's on the cards.

SIR DEN. When do you expect to sail?

SMITH. Not for another month or so, anyhow.

SIR DEN. Ah! Good! . . . By the way, Smith, I've not congratulated you yet.

SMITH. Congratulated me, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. On your promotion. It must be very gratifying for you.

SMITH. It's nice to know that one's thought good enough for it.

SIR DEN. Naturally. Mind you, I'm not surprised. I've had my eye on you ever since your days in the Territorials down here. I marked you down for great things, then, if ever there should be a time like this.

SMITH. Really, Sir Dennys?

SIR DEN. Yes. You were one of the few men who took the thing really seriously and one of the still fewer who realized that this smash with Germany was bound to come.

SMITH. (*Smilingly*) Ah, yes, I remember. My opinions used to get me into trouble with you in those days.

SIR DEN. With me? No, no, you must be thinking of somebody else! Why, I've realized that the thing was inevitable ever since that affair at Agadir!

The entrance of WILSON causes a timely diversion.

Want me, Wilson?

WILSON. (*Clearly Uncomfortable*) There's—um—er—a gentleman to see you, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Who is it?

WILSON. (*Hesitatingly*) It's — er — er — Colonel Smith's brother, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Oh yes, yes, of course. (*He turns to SMITH in explanation*) I asked him to come up and see me on—um—er—a little matter of business, Probably you'd like to have a word with him.

SMITH. That's very kind of you, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. Not at all. . . . Ask Mr Smith to come in, Wilson.

WILSON goes out.

(*Turning again to SMITH*) Does your brother know that you're down here?

SMITH. No, I meant to send him a wire, but I forgot.

SIR DEN. Ah! Then it'll be a pleasant surprise for him.

SMITH. (*Smiling*) I hope it will.

WILSON reappears in the doorway and announces :—

WILSON. Mr Smith.

ALBERT SMITH enters. *He is several years older than his brother, and is both shorter and stouter in build. He looks what he is—an eminently respectable tradesman; and, to his credit be it spoken, he has never, in the whole course of his career, pretended to be anything else. The best and the worst that can be told of ALBERT SMITH is contained in the phrase "a worthy individual." No one could say more of him, and no one less. He is a man of simple tastes and simple habits—of mind as much as of body. Entirely without ambition, he is supremely content with his lot, and aspires to nothing higher—be it mentally, materially, or socially. He knows his "betters" when he sees them, and treats them with a deference and respect, their in-*

herited right to which he would never dream of questioning any more than he would dream of expecting to be received by them as an equal. A man's attitude in such matters is governed by the measure of his educational development, and ALBERT SMITH'S education has been strictly limited. This is not to say that he drops his aitches in speaking, or that he is ignorant of the everyday conventions. But he is never quite comfortable in the presence of his superiors, and his nervousness makes him appear more gauche than in reality he is. His speech is marred by a distinct burr. He wears an overcoat, and carries a hard felt hat in his gloved hands.

SIR DEN. Ah! Come in, Smith—come in!

ALBERT. Thank you, Sir Dennys—good-mornin', sir—good-mornin', Miss—good-mornin', Mr Alec.

SIR DEN. We've got your brother here.

ALBERT. Hullo, Ted! Didn't expect to see you.

SMITH. (*As they shake hands*) I don't suppose you did, Bert. How are you?

ALBERT. I'm pretty middlin', thank you. Bit bothered by rheumatics. But one's got to expect them at my time o' life. No need to ask how you are.

SMITH. No. I'm very fit.

ALBERT. You came down on the 10.30, I suppose.

SMITH. No. Mr Broughton was good enough to run me down in his car.

ALBERT. (*Much impressed by what is—to him—a remarkable condescension*) Indeed! I'm sure it was very kind of Mr Alec.

ALEC. Not a bit. It was very kind of the Colonel to give me his company.

ALBERT. (*Puzzled*) The Colonel, Mr Alec?

SMITH. I thought you knew, Bert—I've been given command of the battalion.

ALBERT. (*To his brother*) You don't mean to say that you an' Mr Alec are in the same regiment?

ALEC. Rather! He's the great man, and I'm one of his subs—one of what he calls his "band of irresponsibles."

ALBERT. You don't say so, Mr Alec! Well, I never! . . . The war's full of surprises, isn't it?

BETTY. Won't you sit down, Mr Smith?

ALBERT. It's very kind of you, miss, but—if you'll excuse me—I'm a bit pressed for time this morning, so if Sir Dennys'd be so good as to——

SIR DEN. You want to be getting to business, eh?

ALBERT. If it's all the same to you, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. (*Rising*) Right. Then, if you'll excuse us, Betty, we'll go into the library.

ALBERT. (*To his brother*) I wonder, Ted, if you'd mind just givin' me your advice.

SMITH. With pleasure. What about?

ALBERT. It's about Sir Dennys' tunic. . . . Excuse me, Sir Dennys.

He puts his hand on SIR DENNYS' shoulders and turns him around so that he can give his brother visible evidence of the tunic's deficiencies.

You see what I mean. This back—it won't do at all.

SMITH. (*Examining the garment with the eye of a connoisseur*) H'm! It's certainly not up to the mark.

ALBERT. Bennett's cut it very badly, I'm afraid. . . . I don't pretend to be an expert in military work, but you are—or ought to be by this time—so I thought, perhaps——

SMITH. I'll come along with you.

SIR DEN. No, no, Smith—sir—it's extremely kind of you, but really I couldn't hear of it.

SMITH. Why not, Sir Dennys? I shall be very pleased.

SIR DEN. It's very good of you, but—er—don't you know—I—er——

SMITH. But I should like to.

SIR DEN. Oh, well, of course—if you insist——

SMITH. (*As he opens the door*) Then perhaps you'll lead the way, Sir Dennys.

SIR DENNYS *goes out followed by SMITH and his brother.*

BETTY *smiles cynically as the door closes upon them. She turns to her brother with uplifted eyebrows.*

BETTY. Rather a novel situation for a Colonel to be placed in, wasn't it?

ALEC. So novel that only a big man would have known how to tackle it. . . . By Gad, it was fine!

BETTY. (*Satirically*) Nature's gentleman!

ALEC. (*With defiant emphasis*) A sahib!

BETTY. (*Laughing*) You're a quaint person, Alec!

ALEC. Why?

BETTY. Because you can't help it, I suppose. . . . Isn't Father a scream?

ALEC. He's a marvel! To hear him talk about the Territorials now, one might think that he'd invented them, and I'll swear that four years ago there wasn't a man in the country who did more to try and queer their pitch! He *has* got a nerve!

BETTY. And a memory as convenient as that of a Cabinet Minister who's crossed the floor of the House. . . . By the way, Ronny Wareing rang up this morning to ask for your address. He's in the gunners.

ALEC. I know. Is he on leave?

BETTY. He has been. But he joins up again to-night. They're going to the Front to-morrow.

ALEC. Oh, I must see the old chap before he goes. What time's he off, d'you know?

BETTY. I'm not quite sure. Some time this afternoon, I think.

The door opens and SMITH comes back into the room. BETTY turns to him.

Ah! Has your brother gone?

SMITH. He ought to have done, Miss Broughton, but Sir Dennys kindly offered to take him round the farm, and he couldn't resist. Fate has made a tailor of him, but Nature certainly intended him to be a farmer.

BETTY. (*Smiling*) Hence the tunic, eh?

ALEC. I say, sir, Betty's just been telling me that my oldest pal is down here on leave. He goes to the Front to-night, and—er—well, I should most awfully like to wish him luck, and all that sort of thing. Would you think it fearfully rotten of me if I ran round in the car to see him? I'd be back in half an hour.

SMITH. Of course, my dear fellow. Go, by all means—that is if Miss Broughton can put up with me in the meantime.

ALEC. Thanks awfully, sir. I shan't be long.

He goes out.

SMITH (*After a brief pause*) What a fine lad that brother of yours is, Miss Broughton.

BETTY. He is rather a dear, isn't he?

SMITH. One of the best.

BETTY. It's curious that he should have turned out as he has done. He used to be such an impossible little snob.

SMITH. Snobbery's a peace-time complaint. It's like the German measles. It's gone completely out of fashion since the war.

BETTY. What's the war got to do with snobbery?

SMITH. A lot! You see the God of War's in supreme command just now—and he's a most shocking old

Socialist! Blue blood doesn't impress him one bit. It's red blood, new blood, the blood of healthy men that he demands.

BETTY. He's taking his toll of it.

SMITH. And doesn't it make you thrill to see how gladly men are giving it to him? . . . Oh, it's good to be an Englishman to-day!

There is a little pause before BETTY reminds him :—

BETTY. You were saying—about snobbery——

SMITH. Oh, yes—I was saying that the God of War's got no use for the highly born just because they're highly born. But, equally, he's got no use for the rich just because they are rich. His favours are not for sale. He hands them out to the most amazing people. He doesn't seem to care a hang who they are, or what they've been, so long as they know their job and can be of use to him.

BETTY. Well?

SMITH. Well, what's the use of being a snob under those conditions? Nowadays a man's ability must be greater than his side, otherwise Germany'll beat us, which, as Euclid has it, is absurd!

BETTY. I don't wonder that you crow!

SMITH. Oh—please!—I really wasn't crowing. At least, I hope I wasn't.

BETTY. Do you remember the last time that you were here? You came in your uniform, and people weren't impressed as they ought to have been. In fact, they seemed to think it a pity that——

SMITH. That an otherwise respectable tailor should be making such a gratuitous idiot of himself.

BETTY. And now, the very next time that you come into the house, you come as my brother's Colonel. . . . It's a great score for you!

SMITH. (*A little anxiously*) Do you object?

BETTY. I think it's most amusing.

SMITH. Oh, the God of War's not without a certain grim sense of humour.

BETTY. It's not always grim. If you could see Father hopping round the park on one foot at the command of one of his grooms—well——!

SMITH. (*Appreciatively*) One can't help laughing at the idea!—but, by Jove, it's fine of him! It must be far more difficult for a man of his age and his prejudices to place himself voluntarily in a position that demands that he should call his tailor "sir" than it is for—well, for your brother, for instance.

BETTY. Oh, I don't know. It's all a game to him, and that happens to be one of the rules.

She moves over to a table, upon which are a silver cigarette box and a bowl of matches. She takes a cigarette, and then offers the box to SMITH, who takes one also. They smoke.

Weren't you surprised when your new sub turned out to be Alec?

SMITH. Almost as surprised as he was to find me in command. (*He pauses before continuing hesitatingly*) I hope that——

BETTY. Yes?

SMITH. Well—that it wouldn't have made any difference if he'd known that I was to be his Colonel.

BETTY. I thought you said that snobbery had been killed by the war.

SMITH. I know. But this is an exceptional case.

BETTY. He seems quite satisfied. In fact, he said it was a jolly fine regiment, and he was proud to belong to it.

SMITH. (*Much gratified*) Ah! . . . He's going to make a first-class soldier.

BETTY. He says you are one.

SMITH. That remains to be proved. I'm a good enough soldier on paper. But the test comes

when you've got to put your knowledge into practice, with shells screaming overhead and bullets whistling all round you.

BETTY. You sound as though you were actually looking forward to the ordeal!

SMITH. I am looking forward to it! Oh, if you only knew how much! I've wanted to be a soldier all my life, but I've never had the chance of the real thing till now. This war, that's brought such misery to millions, has brought me my great opportunity.

BETTY. And is there nobody to whom it may bring misery in your case? Have you only yourself to consider?

SMITH. There's my brother. But he's married, and——

BETTY. Aren't you?

There is an anxiety underlying her question which not all her elaborate assumption of indifference can conceal entirely.

SMITH. No—I—I'm not married.

BETTY. That's funny. I felt sure you would be.

SMITH. Why?

BETTY. I seem to remember you saying that no man was complete in himself. That it required the blending of two personalities to—to make the finished article.

SMITH. I still believe that, but one's got to find one's complement first, and— (*He pauses and looks her straight in the face*) I haven't.

BETTY. That's a pity, isn't it? It must be very trying for you to go about realizing that you're only half what you ought to be!

SMITH. (*Smiling*) Still, I've got my compensations. I have my dream-woman—my ideal. . . . She has her advantages, you know. She never argues, and she doesn't keep a dressmaker!

BETTY. I don't suppose she would, even in real life.
Your ideal would naturally be tailor-made.

SMITH *laughs*. BETTY *continues*:—

It's funny to hear you talking of ideals again.

SMITH. Is it—why?

BETTY. It takes me back to the time when they used to have the same effect upon me that champagne has to-day.

SMITH. You pay me a very pretty compliment.

BETTY. I don't know. You see, champagne always goes to my head. So did your ideals. They used to make me—well, not quite responsible for my actions.

SMITH. You're making fun of me, Miss Broughton.

BETTY. No, no, indeed! I'm trying to explain to you how it was that I failed to distinguish between you and your ideals. I thought that falling in love with your ideals was the same thing as falling in love with you—until you, very kindly, brought me to my senses.

SMITH. Please——!

BETTY. Now I understand that a man and his ideals are two totally separate things, that ideals are just hobbies, and must never be allowed to interfere with business. Of course, they mustn't! It doesn't cost one anything to give up an ideal, but it does cost a lot if one has to lose a customer—and, if you'd married me, I quite see that you couldn't have gone on making trousers for my father.

SMITH. You're being very cruel, Miss Broughton.

BETTY. Oh, surely not! I just wanted you to know that I've learnt my lesson, and that I understand now that little things like the amount of one's bank balance, the length of one's pedigree, even the way one eats one's soup—little things that one ignores when one's looking at life ideally—become matters of the first importance when one regards it practically.

SMITH. Really, Miss Broughton, the explanation isn't necessary.

BETTY. (*Relentlessly*) I've often wondered what would have happened if you'd married me.

SMITH. I've wondered too.

BETTY. I'm afraid I should have been an awful failure as a tailor's wife. I hate needle-work, and house-work, and all that sort of thing—and, of course, I should have been expected to sew the buttons on and dust the shop, shouldn't I?

SMITH. Haven't you punished me enough?

BETTY. Do tell me. Should I have had to sit in the parlour, and keep the accounts? . . . Tailors have parlours, don't they?

SMITH. They're quite normal people.

BETTY. It would have been rather fun sending out the bills! I should have loved writing on them in red ink—you know—"This account being considerably overdue, your immediate attention will oblige"—or, "We shall be glad of a remittance by return." I should have been quite good at that. . . . All the same, I think you've had a lucky escape. It was a good thing that you didn't care for me.

SMITH. (*With sudden violence*) I *did* care for you!

BETTY. Oh, please——!

SMITH. No! You've had your innings, Miss Broughton. Now it's my turn. You've been very cruel to me. I don't think I've deserved it. However, there are always two sides to a question. You've shown me one. Let me show you the other. From the first moment that I met you, I've wanted you as I've wanted nothing else in life. You've reminded me that I had the opportunity of winning you. Well, at that time, I wasn't in a position to make you happy—you know the circumstances—and so I deliberately refused the chance that I would have given my

soul to take. You think that was easy! If you knew how I suffered!—how I've gone on suffering all these years! . . . If only four years ago had been to-day, things might have been different. The war's given me my chance, and when it's over—well, who knows? Till then I still have my dream-woman. She'll come with me to the Front. She'll stand beside me in the trenches. She'll help me to keep my courage high, and to realize the things I mean to realize—my dream-woman, who has your face.

The tense silence that ensues is broken upon by LADY BROUGHTON, who bustles into the room so full of excitement at the prospect of greeting ALEC that she fails to notice SMITH, who is not directly in her line of vision.

It is with visible effort that BETTY forces herself to appear as if nothing had occurred to disturb her in the interval which has elapsed between her mother's departure from the house and her return.

BETTY. Hullo, Mother! Back sooner than you expected.

LADY B. Yes. I was a little late in getting there, so they put that dreadful Mrs Ruislip in the chair. Of course she talked the whole time, and talked such absurd nonsense that I simply hadn't the patience to stop and listen to her.

She turns her head, and catches sight of somebody in uniform. Her first thought being for ALEC, she gives an exclamation of delight, which turns into one of disappointed enquiry as she realizes her mistake. BETTY reminds her:—

BETTY. I think you know Colonel Smith, dear, don't you?

LADY BROUGHTON raises her lorgnettes to her eyes, and regards SMITH curiously.

LADY B. Do I? . . . I don't think I—er——

SMITH. (*Smiling, as he advances to greet her*) You've forgotten me, Lady Broughton.

LADY B. Why, of course, it's *Mister* Smith. (*She becomes graciously patronizing*) It's such a long time since you left Sheffingham that I really didn't recognize you. How do you do?

SMITH. I'm very well, thank you, Lady Broughton. I hope you are.

LADY B. I'm quite well, thank you. . . . Did I hear Miss Broughton say that you were a Colonel?

SMITH. I've just been promoted.

LADY B. How very nice for you! . . . You're waiting to see Sir Dennys, I suppose?

BETTY. Colonel Smith's seen Father already, Mother. He's waiting for Alec.

LADY B. (*As who would say, "I really can't see any reason why he should"*) Oh! . . . Where is Alec?

BETTY. He's just run over to Kingsworthy to say good-bye to Ronny Wareing. He goes to the Front to-night, you know.

LADY B. (*Much perturbed*) Alec does!

BETTY. No, no, dear! Ronny.

LADY B. (*With a sigh of relief*) Oh! . . . You gave me quite a shock! . . . He'll be back for lunch?

BETTY. Sure to be.

LADY B. Ah! . . . I thought you said that he was bringing his C.O. down with him.

SMITH *is on the point of announcing that he is the officer in question, but BETTY restrains him by a gesture.*

BETTY. So he has done.

LADY B. Well, where is he?

BETTY. (*With a mischievous glance at SMITH*) Somewhere about the house.

The door opens, and ALEC bursts into the room in his usual breezy fashion.

ALEC. (*Addressing the company in general*) Well, I haven't been long, have I?

LADY B. (*A great joy and a great pride in her voice*) My boy!

She hastens towards him.

ALEC moves up to meet her.

ALEC. Hello, Mater! By Jove, it's good to see you again!

LADY BROUGHTON *folds him in her arms and embraces him tenderly. ALEC frees himself gently and holds her at arm's length, regarding her with loving admiration.*

You're looking jolly fit!

LADY B. And so are you, dear—splendid! That's a great relief to me.

ALEC. Why, what did you expect? Were you afraid that the nasty, rough army wouldn't agree with your spoiled darling?

LADY B. Well, dear, it was a great change for you.

ALEC. A great change for the better! . . . It's made a different man of me—hasn't it, Betty?—eh?

BETTY. (*With emphasis*) It has, indeed!

LADY B. Now, tell me, what have you done with your Colonel?

ALEC looks from her to SMITH with knitted brow.

He suspects the presence of a joke, but is uncertain.

ALEC. Done with him? What do you mean, Mater?

Poor SMITH is growing very uncomfortable.

He senses an awkward moment approaching, but having been inveigled by BETTY into becoming a passive accessory to her mischievous plot, does not see how he is to avert it.

LADY B. Well, where is he?

His mother's tone convinces ALEC that she has

not been informed of the circumstances. He turns to his sister.

ALEC. Haven't you told the Mater, Betty?

LADY B. Betty's told me that he's somewhere about the house, but——

ALEC. (*Imagining that he has solved the mystery*)

Oh, I see! (*He turns to SMITH*) So you and Betty have been conspiring to pull the Mater's leg, sir, have you?

The first premonition of the awful truth catches at LADY BROUGHTON'S heart-strings.

LADY B. Pull my——! (*She breaks off abruptly, and looks with burning eyes from SMITH to BETTY. In their faces she reads the truth, but—despite the certainty—she refuses to believe it. She turns again to her son, and exclaims wildly*) Alec! You can't mean——!

ALEC. (*Now more mystified than ever*) What, Mater?

She turns from him with trembling lips.

SMITH steps into the breach.

SMITH. (*Uncomfortably, but not without dignity*)

I'm afraid, Broughton, that your mother is distressed to learn—— (*He pauses, anxious to choose his words aright*)

ALEC. To learn what, sir?

SMITH. That I have the honour to command the battalion to which you have been gazetted.

Such a suggestion appeals to ALEC as being too preposterous for words. He resents it, and exclaims as indignantly as the etiquette of the service will permit:—

ALEC. Oh, please, sir! Really——!

He has anticipated from his mother an immediate and equally indignant repudiation

of SMITH'S interpretation of her discomposure. Her silence astounds and dismays him. He turns to her and exclaims in deep concern:—

Mater!

SIR DENNYS' voice is heard outside the door.

SIR DEN. (*Off*) Come in, Smith; come in.

He enters, followed by ALBERT SMITH.

(*To LADY B.*) Ah, so you've got back, my dear. . . .

This is Mr Albert Smith.

LADY B. (*Stiffly—inclining her head*) How do you do?

ALBERT. Nicely, thank you, m'lady. Hope you are.

LADY B. Thank you.

The atmosphere of acute discomfort that prevails in the room communicates itself to SIR DENNYS. He divines that some contretemps has occurred in his absence, and makes a valiant—if uneasy—effort to counteract it. He addresses himself to SMITH with assumed breeziness.

SIR DEN. Well—er—er—your brother turns out to be quite an authority on agricultural matters, Smith—um—er— (*He glances nervously in the direction of his wife and lowers his voice before adding*)—sir. (*He observes with satisfaction that his correction has passed unnoticed, and continues more boisterously*) I'd no idea. It was a real pleasure to take him round.

ALBERT. (*Who alone is oblivious of the awkwardness of the situation*) I'm sure it's very good of you to say that, Sir Dennys. It was a great pleasure to me to go round.

He turns with enthusiasm to his brother, and SIR DENNYS seizes the opportunity of endeavouring to get BETTY to communicate to him in dumb show some idea of what has happened.

ALBERT. My word, Ted, if you haven't seen 'em already, you ought to go and have a look at the beasts Sir Dennys has got fattenin' in the byre. They're champion!—far and away the best lot I've seen anywhere roundabouts.

SMITH. (*Anxious to get away the moment that escape can be contrived*) Are they, indeed? Good! . . . Well, now, I think, if Lady Broughton will excuse us, we'd better be getting along, Bert.

ALBERT. (*In evident astonishment*) Are you coming along o' me?

SIR DEN. (*As in duty bound*) Aren't you going to stay to luncheon, sir? Lady Broughton and I—er—

In the agitation of the moment SIR DENNYS has omitted to lower his voice before according SMITH the title of respect that is his due. LADY BROUGHTON starts as though she had been shot, and stares at her husband in blank amazement. He avoids meeting her eye.

SMITH. It's very kind of you, Sir Dennys, but I think my brother's expecting me to lunch with him.

ALBERT. Well, not exactly expectin' you, Ted, but—er—

SMITH digs his elbow sharply into his brother's ribs, and ALBERT exclaims in astonishment:—

Eh?

The expression upon his brother's face brings home to his slow-working intelligence the fact that he has said the wrong thing. He makes haste to continue, albeit in tone of puzzlement:—

Well, I'm sure Gert'll be very glad to see you, if you don't mind takin' pot-luck.

ALEC rushes desperately to the rescue.

ALEC. (*To SMITH*) If you really must go, sir, why not let me run you down in the car? It's just outside.

The suggestion fills LADY BROUGHTON'S cup of mortification to overflowing.

ALBERT. (*Protesting*) Oh, no, Mr Alec, sir! We couldn't think of troublin' you. We can just as easy walk.

ALEC. Nonsense! It won't take me half a second.

SMITH. Thanks, Broughton. Much obliged.

Unable to reconcile himself to the new condition of things, ALBERT gasps in open-mouthed astonishment at such effrontery. He strives to divert attention from his brother's lack of deference, and to make it evident at the same time that he, at any rate, is not devoid of a proper respect for his superiors by hurrying down to the door, and holding it open for ALEC to go through.

ALEC. I'll go and wind her up.

ALEC goes out, ALBERT following him.

SIR DENNYS stands by the doorway.

SMITH advances to LADY BROUGHTON and takes his leave of her.

SMITH. Good-bye, Lady Broughton. (*He lowers his voice*) You may rest assured that I shall not presume on my position.

LADY BROUGHTON is speechless.

SMITH turns towards BETTY, who stands, irresolute, by the window.

Good-bye, Miss Broughton.

The strain which BETTY has endured is beginning to tell on her. She answers him in a strained voice:—

BETTY. Good-bye . . . and—in case I don't see you again before you go out—good luck!

SMITH. (*Gravey*) Thank you. (*He moves to the door*) Good-bye, Sir Dennys.

SIR DEN. I'm coming to see you off.

SMITH. Oh, then——

They go out, talking.

A brief silence ensues before LADY BROUGHTON exclaims passionately:—

LADY B. What *can* Alec have been thinking of?

BETTY. (*In a dull voice*) His duty to his country, I suppose.

LADY B. Certainly not his duty to his—caste!

Again silence falls. The sound of the departing motor-car is heard.

SIR DENNYS *comes back into the room, his nerves as much on edge as those of everybody else. He exclaims agitatedly:—*

SIR DEN. Marian, what on earth have you been doing?

LADY B. Doing my utmost to preserve my sanity. Everybody else would seem to have taken leave of their senses!

SIR DEN. Don't talk such ridiculous nonsense!

LADY B. Did I, or did I not, hear you call the man who used to be your tailor "sir"?

SIR DEN. You heard me address my son's Colonel, and my superior officer, by the title of respect that is his due.

LADY B. Really, Dennys, I have no patience with you! If you must play at soldiers at your time of life, you might at least keep your folly within reasonable bounds. If you're going to be logical, why don't you call your footman "sir"? He's some sort of officer in the "Church Lads' Brigade"!

SIR DEN. There are moments, Marian, when you

annoy me—when you annoy me very much. There are times when you are positively wrong-headed!

He stumps angrily across the room.

BETTY'S *overwrought nerves begin to get the mastery of her. She commences to laugh—hysterically—and is incapable of restraint.*

LADY B. (*Wildly*) Am I standing on my head or my heels?

SIR DEN. You're standing on your dignity—a very wrong proceeding in time of war.

LADY B. Dignity! When I consider that my son—*my son!*—can actually take it for granted that his tailor would have the audacity to—to “pull—my—leg,” I don't feel that I have a shred of dignity left to me!

SIR DEN. Marian, I'm ashamed of you! That you, the mother of a subaltern, the wife of a private soldier, should have had so little respect for the King's uniform as to behave as you have done to their superior officer—an officer of field rank!—it's—it's unbelievable! Not only have you disgraced us both shamefully, you've—you've prejudiced our position in the army beyond redemption!

BETTY'S *last remnant of self-control deserts her finally. She bursts into a peal of hysterical laughter.*

BETTY. General Post! . . . Ha, ha, ha, ha! . . . General Post!

Her laughter changes suddenly to tears. She weeps bitterly and uncontrollably. SIR DENNIS and LADY BROUGHTON both turn and regard their daughter in amazement.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III

The Scene remains the same as in the previous acts, but whereas the costumes worn by the players in Acts I. and II. must be in accord necessarily with the fashions of 1911 and 1915, the designer of the garments to be worn in this, the final act, has fine scope for an exercise of his inventive genius. Greatly daring, the Author has looked forward to that halcyon time when the Great War shall have ended (in entire favour of the Allied forces—bien entendu!) and raises the curtain upon a period which, at the time of writing, can be seen only “as through a glass, darkly”—even by the most visionary amongst us. Those in authority are free to choose what season of the year they will as the period in which the events of the last act transpire—but, seeing that they are supposed to eventuate six months after the “Peace of Berlin,” the author is inclined to favour the end of April or the beginning of May as being, in logic, the most reasonable time to fix upon for their occurrence. Furthermore, the spring-time is essentially and poetically appropriate, so, if the decision depend upon nothing more weighty than personal predilection, let it fall upon April or May.

As at the opening of the first act, the hour is 10 a.m. The morning is fair, and, as the sun floods the room with light, so does the song of the birds, penetrating from the garden through the open windows, fill it with melody.

LADY BROUGHTON, *who is alone in the room when the curtain rises, is engaged upon her every morning*

task of dusting the china. After a brief interval, ALEC enters, attired in a suit of light tweeds. He looks very fit, but is obviously sleepy. The events in which he has played his part during the interval ensuing between the end of the second act and the opening of the third have left their mark on him. Both in manner and appearance he is older. He has attained to his full manhood, and, in the course of its acquisition, he has developed latent faculties and sympathies which have transformed him from a selfish, heedless, happy-go-lucky boy into a considerate and thoughtful man. This is not to say that he has become, in any way, a prig. Far from it. He is full of high spirits and of fun, and men and women alike find him a delightful companion.

LADY BROUGHTON turns to greet him.

LADY B. Ah, so you're down, dear! Have you had your breakfast?

ALEC. Yes, thanks, Mater.

They embrace.

LADY B. Everything all right?

ALEC. Perfectly, thanks. . . . How are you this morning?

LADY B. Just a little tired, dear. I expect you're dreadfully tired, aren't you?

ALEC. I'm a bit sleepy.

LADY B. What time did the ball finish?

ALEC. I dun'no. It was after four when we got back.

LADY B. Poor boy! . . . No wonder you're sleepy. Betty's staying in bed. Why didn't you?

ALEC. Because I wanted my breakfast.

LADY B. Didn't you have it in bed?

ALEC. Good Lord, no!

LADY B. Why not?

ALEC. I can't stick the crumbs! . . . Besides, as a

matter of fact, I haven't been to sleep at all. When we were at the Front we got into the habit of always waking up at day-break—unless we were dead-beat—and I haven't got out of it yet.

LADY B. (*With maternal solicitude*) Then you must go and lie down this afternoon. I can't have you going without sleep. There's nothing knocks one up so quickly.

ALEC. (*In mock protest*) Oh, but you promised that you'd never send me to bed in the afternoon again after I was seven!—unless I was very naughty And I haven't been naughty to-day yet!

LADY B. It was naughty of you not to stay in bed for breakfast. I'd given orders that you were to.

ALEC. (*Laughing*) You *are* a dear, Mater! You make just as much fuss of me as you did when I was a little boy. In fact, I believe you still think of me as a little boy.

LADY B. To me, darling, you'll always be my little boy.

ALEC. (*Drawing down his mother's head and kissing her tenderly upon the brow*) Bless you!

LADY B. Now tell me more about last night. Did Betty dance much with the Brigadier?

ALEC. Dance? No. The ballroom saw very little of either of them.

LADY B. You mean——?

ALEC. That I imagine that more secluded places saw a lot.

LADY B. Alec, what's going to happen?

ALEC. I wish to goodness I knew!

LADY B. Are you worried about it?

ALEC. Yes, dear, I—I can't help feeling a bit worried.

LADY B. You're afraid that she'll accept him.

ALEC *starts and looks at his mother curiously.*

ALEC. Afraid that she will? . . . No. I'm afraid that she won't!

LADY BROUGHTON *sighs, unmistakably in relief.* ALEC *inquires of her anxiously* :—

Mater, you—you don't want her to refuse him, do you?

LADY B. I don't know, dear, I——

ALEC. (*In shocked surprise*) Mater!

LADY B. You've got to remember, Alec, that, ever since I was a little girl, I've been brought up on certain prejudices that have become part of my nature. One can't change one's nature at a moment's notice.

ALEC. Hasn't the war changed it? It's changed mine—in that sort of way—and I thought that it must have changed everybody's. *I* used to think that certain ideas were part of myself, but—somehow or other—they've gone, and quite opposite ones have taken their place. It's been as Betty said from the beginning that it would be. It's been a case of "General Post" for all of us.

LADY B. "General Post" is a game for young people, dear. One finds it a little trying when one gets to my age.

ALEC. (*Putting his arm affectionately around her*) Poor old Mater!

SIR DENNYS *enters by the window. He wears a suit of rough tweeds similar to that in which he was attired in the first act.*

SIR DEN. Ah! Mornin', my boy. How are you feeling after all your dissipation, eh?

ALEC. Oh, pretty fit, sir—all things considered.

SIR DEN. That's right! . . . Well, I think everything went off very well yesterday, didn't it?

ALEC. Capitally.

SIR DEN. Smith must be feeling a proud man this morning.

ALEC. Not he!

SIR DENNYS *looks at him in high surprise.*

He's one of the most modest chaps I ever met—too modest by half.

SIR DEN. He can afford to be modest with everybody in the country blowing his trumpet for him! . . . You know it's amazing! It really is! To think that a chap who started life as a tailor in a provincial town, without any influence behind him, and without anybody to give him a helping hand, should have got where he's got, and set the whole world ringing with his name—upon my word, it's marvellous! Marvellous!

LADY B. It just shows what a man can do once he makes up his mind.

ALEC. And the ripping part of it is that it hasn't spoilt him one bit. He's as fine a chap as ever.

LADY B. I did like the little speech that he made in the Guildhall yesterday. It was so manly and natural—not a scrap of nonsense about it.

SIR DEN. It was an excellent little speech—couldn't have been better. . . . By the way, Alec, what did you think of mine?

ALEC. I thought it went awfully well, sir.

SIR DEN. It did go well, didn't it? Livened 'em up a bit.

WILSON *enters. He carries a newspaper upon a salver.*

WILSON. "The Sheffingham Courier," m'lady.

SIR DEN. Ah, I expect there'll be something about it in that.

ALEC. (*As he takes the paper from WILSON, who goes out*) Something! There'll be columns! The "Courier's" not had such a chance to spread itself since peace was declared. . . . Yes. Here we

are! . . . Reams of it! (*He reads out the headlines*)

“A HERO’S HOME-COMING.

SHEFFINGHAM HONOURS HER GREATEST SON.

FREEDOM OF THE CITY BESTOWED UPON

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SMITH, V.C.

HISTORIC OCCASION IN THE GUILDHALL.

STRIKING SCENES AND STIRRING SPEECHES.”

By George! (*He passes the paper to his mother*)

SIR DEN. You might read it to us, my dear.

LADY B. Oh, I couldn’t! There’re pages of it.

SIR DEN. Well, what’s it say about my speech, eh?

LADY B. Let’s see. . . . Ah, here we are. . . .

D’you want me to read it?

SIR DEN. You might as well.

LADY B. (*Reads*) “Sir Dennys Broughton, whose rising was the signal for an outburst of enthusiastic and prolonged applause——”

SIR DEN. (*Appreciatively*) Ah!

LADY B. “—was in his happiest vein, and spoke with an eloquent sincerity that made a deep impression upon the vast assembly.”

SIR DEN. Very nice of ’em to say so, I’m sure.

LADY B. “After a graceful reference to the respect and esteem in which General Smith had been held by all classes during the years that he had resided in Sheffield, Sir Dennys proceeded to sketch briefly the course of the eminent soldier’s career from the moment that he first identified himself with military matters by joining the Territorial forces at the time of their inception.”

ALEC. Oh, I say! . . . You know, Pater, it’s a good thing you weren’t as long-winded as the gentleman who’s reported you.

SIR DEN. Eh? . . . Oh, I dunno . . . I think he’s put it rather well myself. . . . Go on, my dear.

LADY B. "Although he dealt of the matter with a light touch, the observant could not fail to discern——"

ALEC. Or the discerning to observe!

LADY B. "—a bitter note of scorn underlying Sir Dennys' reference to the unfortunately large body of people who were wont, at one time, to regard the Territorial movement with contempt. It afforded him much pleasure to reflect that he had not been numbered amongst these human clogs upon the wheels of progress."

ALEC. I like that. That's distinctly good. "Human clods upon the wheels of progress." First-class!

LADY B. Sh! (*She finds her place again and continues:*) "... upon the wheels of progress. . . . It afforded him even more pleasure to recall the fact that he had been privileged to be amongst the few who had recognized General Smith's commanding ability many years before there came to him the opportunity to exercise his military genius before the eyes of an astounded world."

ALEC. If you could have seen Smith's face when you said that——!

LADY B. (*Interrupting him hurriedly*) "Loud and prolonged applause."

ALEC. It brought the house down all right.

LADY B. (*In gentle protest*) Don't interrupt, dear, if you don't mind, or I shall never get to the end.

ALEC. Sorry, Mater.

SIR DEN. It makes it very difficult to follow, you know.

ALEC. Sorry, sir.

SIR DEN. That's all right, my boy. . . . Now get along, my dear.

LADY B. Let's see, where did we get to? . . . Oh yes, "—an astounded world. He was bound to confess that he looked back with a certain gratification to the enthusiasm with which he had received the news that his son had been gazetted to

a commission in the regiment of which the General was at that time in command——”

ALEC *refrains from comment only with extreme difficulty. He utters a strange sound which, if one were charitably minded, might be attributed to a clearing of his throat.*

(LADY B. *continues*) “And he was proud to feel that his own flesh and blood had been privileged to stand by the General’s side on that memorable occasion on which, by an act of gallantry and daring unparalleled in the annals of our Empire, he had saved a division from disaster, and had won for himself not only the most illustrious decoration in the world, but an undying fame and an imperishable glory.”

ALEC. I wish you hadn’t dragged me into it, Pater. I did nothing—except obey orders.

SIR DEN. A soldier doesn’t get his D.S.O. for nothing, my boy.

LADY B. General Smith told me himself that, if it hadn’t been for you——

ALEC. I know, dear. But that’s just his generosity. I believe he’d have said the same even if I’d turned tail and run!

SIR DEN. Stuff and nonsense!

ALEC. I mean it. He’s that sort. . . . Now for the peroration! Fire ahead, Mater!

LADY B. “We will give the remainder of Sir Dennys Broughton’s speech in his own words:—‘The story of that gallant enterprise must be too fresh in the minds of all of you to require repetition. But can you picture it? If any of you have visited the tropics, you will probably have had experience of a tropical hailstorm. If you have, you are not likely to have forgotten it. Imagine then, if you can, just such a storm, but with this awful difference—instead of stones, a hail of flying mullets!’”

SIR DEN. A hail of—*what?*

LADY B. Mullets!

SIR DEN. *Mullets!*

LADY B. That's what it puts.

SIR DEN. Oh, nonsense! They—let's have a look at it!

He fishes in his pockets for his glasses, puts them on, and takes the paper from his wife. He scans the report, and finding that LADY BROUGHTON'S reading is correct, crumples it into a ball, and flings it from him furiously.

Damnation!

LADY B. What ought it to have been, dear?

SIR DEN. Why, bullets, of course! . . . I'd like to put a few into the "Courier's" reporter!

ALEC. Oh, cheer up, Pater! It isn't so bad that it mightn't have been a great deal worse.

SIR DEN. How d'you mean?

ALEC. Well, mullets are quite nice fish. Supposing he'd put haddocks!

The suggestion causes SIR DENNYS to explode in a fresh outburst of indignation.

SIR DEN. It's outrageous! There's no other word for it—outrageous! It's my opinion that it's done on purpose!

LADY B. My dear!

SIR DEN. It is, indeed. The "Courier's" a radical rag, and its editor's a most unscrupulous chap. I've noticed once or twice before—when I've been addressing a meeting on 'Tariff Reform or something of that sort—they've made me say the most ridiculous things.

ALEC. (*With a twinkle in his eye*) Oh, surely not, *made* you say them, Pater?

SIR DEN. (*Oblivious of the sarcasm*) Yes, they have. They've deliberately misreported me! . . .

All this stuff and nonsense that they talk about party politics having ended with the war! Looks like it, doesn't it?

LADY B. It's certainly very careless of them to have made such a mistake. But I shouldn't let it worry you, dear, if I were you.

SIR DEN. I've no intention of letting it worry me. But, you must admit, Marian, it's annoying—to say the least of it.

ALEC. Until you see the funny side of it.

SIR DEN. (*With exasperation*) The funny side of a mullet! Tchah!

LADY B. (*To ALEC*) Are we to expect General Smith to luncheon, dear?

ALEC. If he can manage to get up in time.

SIR DEN. Why? Was he very late last night?

ALEC. I don't expect he turned in much before half-past four.

SIR DEN. He stayed to the end then?

ALEC. Well, seeing that the ball was given in his honour, he more or less had to.

SIR DEN. Oh, yes, yes, of course. I didn't think of that. . . . By the way, Alec, I wanted to ask you—Cholmondeley was chipping me about the attention that Smith was paying to Betty. Said all the other girls were furious. None of 'em got a look in. Did you notice it at all?

LADY B. I asked Alec the same question just before you came in, dear. He seems to think that we oughtn't to attach too much importance to it.

SIR DENNYS *turns in surprise to his son.*

SIR DEN. D'you mean that Smith has *not* been paying marked attention to your sister?

ALEC. (*Uncomfortably*) No, not quite that. But
—er—

LADY B. Alec thinks that Betty likes him very much, dear—but only as a friend.

SIR DEN. (*To ALEC*) But why? What makes you think that?

ALEC. That's rather a difficult question to answer. I—I've got nothing definite to go upon. But little things that Betty's said to me from time to time, little things that—

SIR DEN. Pshaw! She's said the same sort of "little thing" to me—deliberately, to try and put me off the scent. But *I've* not allowed myself to be taken in! . . . Betty's not the girl to wear her heart upon her sleeve.

ALEC's sole answer is a sigh of non-conviction.

LADY B. Am I to gather, then, Dennys, that the match would meet with your approval?

SIR DEN. Emphatically! . . . Wouldn't it meet with yours?

LADY B. I don't know. I—I do wish he hadn't been a tailor.

SIR DEN. (*Pained*) My dear Marian, such a reflection is unworthy of you. It borders upon—well, I had almost said—er—snobbishness!

LADY B. (*Sweetly*) Of course, dear, you never felt like that about him.

SIR DEN. I—er—I—er—I'm happy to say that I *don't* feel like that about him. . . . In my opinion, he's earned the right to be treated—well, as one of us.

ALEC. He's not the first man who's risen to great heights from very small beginnings, you know, Mater.

SIR DEN. Of course he isn't! Take the great Duke of Marlborough for instance. We all know that he started life as a bugler in the army.

ALEC. Did he? I thought he was a cornet.

SIR DEN. Well, I know it was some sort of wind-instrument!

ALEC. (*Laughing*) A cornet was a lieutenant.

SIR DEN. An honorary lieutenant, perhaps—if he was the bandmaster. But that doesn't matter. Point is he started at the bottom of the ladder, and became eventually the founder of an historic line. And I see no reason at all why Smith shouldn't do the same thing.

ALEC. Whether he does or he doesn't, he'll still be the best fellow in the world. The girl who gets him'll be jolly lucky.

SIR DEN. I'm entirely with you, my boy.

LADY B. Well, I seem to be outvoted. . . . I think you were right, Dennys. It was snobbery that was making me hesitate. Alec's fine faith in the man by whose side he's fought, and whom he's had opportunity of proving as you and I never can have, makes my objections seem very contemptible, and very small. I—I'm ashamed of myself.

ALEC, *much touched, kisses his mother.*

ALEC. Dear old Mater!

LADY B. But, after all, our opinions are not of much importance. The decision rests entirely with Betty.

SIR DEN. Exactly! Exactly!

BETTY *enters, looking delightfully fresh and pretty in a simple morning gown. She goes up to her mother and kisses her "Good-morning."*

BETTY. Am I the last down?

LADY B. We didn't expect you to be the first, dear. In fact we didn't expect to see you down at all before lunch.

BETTY. I should love to have stayed in bed, but General Smith bet me that I shouldn't be down when he arrived, and I bet him a box of chocolates that I should, so, of course I had to get up.

SIR DEN. You little humbug, you! . . . Come here, and kiss your father.

BETTY. (*Obeying*) Why am I a humbug?

SIR DEN. How many dances did you have with the Brigadier last night?

BETTY. I dun'no. Quite a lot.

SIR DEN. So we've heard.

BETTY. Well, you see, he's quite a good dancer, and our steps go well together. I'd rather not dance at all than dance with somebody who keeps tumbling over your feet the whole time.

SIR DEN. H'm!

LADY B. (*Guilelessly*) Didn't you sit out at all, dear?

BETTY. We sat out one or two, I think. General Smith was rather tired after all that business in the Guildhall, and the luncheon, and so on. . . . He's a most amusing person to sit out with. There's no end to the funny stories he's brought back from the Front.

SIR DEN. (*With would-be humorous sarcasm*) And I suppose he was telling you funny stories all the time!

BETTY. Most of it.

SIR DEN. You're a minx, young woman! That's what you are!—a sly minx!

BETTY. What *do* you mean, Father? What's all this about?

LADY B. I think your father means, dear, that if you and General Smith are still fond of one another, we see no reason why—

BETTY. You don't mean to say—? . . . Oh, really, it's too silly!

SIR DEN. Silly! What's silly?

BETTY. Why, to imagine that there's anything of that sort between us. General Smith and I are very good friends—and that's all.

A pause of stupefaction. Everybody regards this statement as direct confirmation of ALEC's forebodings. SIR DENNYS clears his throat.

SIR DEN. Very well. If that's the case, all I've got to say is that I think you've treated him abominably!

BETTY. How do you make that out?

SIR DEN. A man has every right to expect more than mere friendship from a girl who gives him half her programme at a ball.

BETTY. Really, Father, what rubbish! You go to a dance to dance—not to talk twaddle under a palm. If you find a man who dances well, you can give him your *whole* programme, and he'll think no more about it.

SIR DEN. I'm sure Smith didn't look at it in that light.

BETTY. How do you know?

SIR DEN. Ask Alec.

BETTY, who is becoming very annoyed, turns to her brother.

BETTY. Well?

ALEC. I know he's jolly fond of you, Betty. You must know it, too.

BETTY. Oh! So it's a conspiracy, is it?

SIR DEN. What d'you mean—conspiracy?

LADY B. (*Gently*) Don't talk nonsense, dear.

BETTY. Well, you all appear to have been discussing the matter, and to have made up your minds that I ought to marry General Smith, regardless of whether I wish to do so, or I don't.

LADY B. It's foolish to talk like that, dear. You know perfectly well that we don't wish you to do anything that you don't wish to do yourself.

SIR DEN. Exactly! If you don't love the man—well, there's an end of it.

BETTY. But years ago, when I wanted to marry him, you were all of you furious. You said you'd sooner see me—well, in Germany! Now the situation's reversed. I don't want to marry him, and you're all insisting that I shall.

LADY B. We're not insisting on anything at all, dear.

BETTY. Well, you'd all like me to marry him, that's obvious. . . . What's made you change your minds? Isn't he the same man now that he was then?

SIR DEN. Of course he isn't!

BETTY. Then he isn't the man who used to come here and measure you for your clothes?

SIR DEN. You'll make me very angry with you in a minute, Betty. You know perfectly well what I mean. It was not the man himself I was referring to. It was his position.

BETTY. (*Very sweetly*) Oh, I see. Then it's not the man you want me to marry. It's his position.

SIR DEN. Upon my word, of all the impossible women I've ever had to deal with, I—I——!

LADY B. Well, let's talk of something else—shall we?

ALEC. Yes, for goodness sake, do! . . . But I must say, Betty, that I think it's rotten—worse than rotten—of a girl to lead a man on, as you've led Smith, if she's no intention of seeing the thing through.

BETTY *alters her tactics. She becomes all penitence and sweetness.*

BETTY. Oh, please, don't let's get cross about it.

It's all my fault, I know. I got cross first. I'm sorry. That's the worst of going to bed too late. One's so liable to get out of it the wrong side next morning. (*She goes to her father caressingly*) I'm so sorry, Father, if I made you vexed with me. Do forgive me, please!

SIR DEN. (*Mollified*) There, there, my dear. We won't say any more about it.

BETTY. But I want you to say more about it. . . . I want your advice. I want the advice of all of you.

SIR DEN. Well, my dear, we're only too ready to give it to you.

BETTY. You'll remember that the first time this subject came up—ages ago now—I thought it was just snobbishness that made you all so set against the idea of my marrying Mr Smith.

SIR DEN. And, since then, you've realized how wrong you were.

BETTY. I know. But, just for the moment, I couldn't help the suspicion that it might be something of the sort that made you want me to marry him now.

SIR DEN. Why on earth should you think that?

BETTY. Mr Smith, the tailor, was a nobody. Brigadier-General Smith, V.C., is a somebody—very much a somebody.

SIR DEN. Well?

BETTY. Well, it just crossed my mind that, whereas it wouldn't have been nice for you—in fact, you couldn't very well have introduced people to your son-in-law Mr Smith, the tailor, it might give you considerable satisfaction to introduce them to your son-in-law General Smith—the man who saved the situation at Cojada, or whatever the name of the place was.

SIR DEN. Such a thought never entered my head!

BETTY. No, I'm sure it didn't. I'm only just saying that I'm sorry that it entered mine.

ALEC. But, look here, old girl, you can't very well compare things as they are now with things as they were in 1911. For one thing, we'd no idea then what sort of a chap Smith was. He might have been the most awful ruffian for all we knew. We've learnt since that he isn't. I've found out that—well, you know how I feel about him. So far as I'm concerned, I don't want you to marry him for any reason at all except that there's no chap in the world I'd sooner have for a brother-in-law.

BETTY. But I found out all that years ago. Why wouldn't you take my word for it?

LADY B. Dear, what is the use of arguing about what happened years ago? Indeed, what is the use of arguing at all? . . . We none of us want you to give your hand where your heart isn't.

SIR DEN. Exactly! Exactly! As I said before, if you don't like Smith sufficiently to—to—well, there's an end of it.

BETTY. But I do like him. I like him very much. It's because I like him so much that I want your advice.

SIR DEN. Well?

BETTY. In the first instance you all thought for me. Now I'm trying to think for you.

SIR DEN. (*Bewildered*) For us?

BETTY. Yes. . . . Assuming that General Smith were to ask me to marry him, and I were to accept him, you'd still go on living in Sheffingham, I suppose?

SIR DEN. Of course we should.

LADY B. There isn't any reason why we shouldn't, is there?

BETTY. General Smith's brother will also go on living in Sheffingham.

SIR DEN. Well, what about it?

BETTY. I just thought that you mightn't quite like being connected by marriage with the local tailor. It struck me that it might make things rather awkward for you.

SIR DEN. I don't see that at all.

BETTY. You'd have to include him and his wife in your visiting list. In fact, you'd have to ask them up to dinner every now and then.

SIR DEN. (*Distinctly perturbed*) Would that be necessary, Marian?

LADY B. I see not the least occasion for it.

BETTY. Well, but think what would happen when we came to stay down here. The General would naturally want to go and see his brother, wouldn't he?

ALEC. Of course, he would. There's nothing of the snob about him.

BETTY. I should have to go with him. We might even have to stay with them. In which case they'd be certain to invite you to high tea, and you'd simply have to ask them back to dinner afterwards.

SIR DEN. (*Shaken*) We—we needn't have anybody to meet them, even if we did.

BETTY. Wouldn't that look rather pointed?

SIR DEN. My dear girl, these things can be dealt with as and when they arise. It's no good meeting trouble half-way. It seems to me that your objections are entirely frivolous. Besides, Smith will soon be above all that sort of thing. I have it on very good authority that, in recognition of the wonderful services he has rendered to the State, they intend to make him a Baronet. He'll be a Peer before he's finished.

BETTY. In which case the possession of a tailor brother will be regarded as an amusing eccentricity. Is that what you mean?

SIR DENNYS *begins to lose his temper.*

SIR DEN. I don't mean anything of the sort. And I'm hanged if I'm going to explain what I do mean! If this is your idea of asking advice, it isn't mine. I decline to discuss the subject any further. You must be left to work out your own salvation.

BETTY. We've all got to do that in any case.

SIR DEN. What's become of all your fine theories about "General Post," and so on? You were ready enough to cram them down other people's throats, but you don't seem able to swallow them yourself.

LADY B. (*Intervening*) Well now, dear, don't let's say any more about it.

SIR DEN. I'm not saying any more about it! I've said all that I intend to say. . . . Smith's family have got nothing whatsoever to do with it. He's not asking Betty to marry his family!

BETTY. He's not asked me to marry him yet.

SIR DEN. He will do—if you give him half a chance.

BETTY. I don't think he will.

SIR DEN. What d'you mean?

BETTY. He's already refused me.

SIR DEN. *Refused* you?

ALEC. But—good Lord!—that sounds as if you'd proposed to him!

BETTY. (*Calmly*) I did.

SIR DEN. Good Heavens! . . . Well! . . . Really!

LADY B. Betty! You—you can't be serious!

BETTY. I'm perfectly serious. . . . Oh, it's quite a long time ago. In fact, it was just after you'd said

that I wasn't to see him any more. That's what made me do it. But, as I say, he refused me.

SIR DEN. You mean to tell me you proposed to my tailor?

BETTY. (*Enjoying herself hugely*) I proposed to the man you're asking me to marry.

SIR DEN. Well, all I've got to say is, if I were in Smith's place, I'm hanged if I'd have anything more to do with you! I'd see you somewhere before I'd marry a girl who'd so demeaned herself as to propose to a tailor!

BETTY *bursts into a peal of genuine merriment.*

BETTY. Oh, Father! Father! That's your masterpiece!

WILSON *enters.*

WILSON. General Smith, m'lady—in the drawing-room.

LADY B. Thank you, Wilson. I'll come at once.

WILSON *goes out.*

LADY BROUGHTON *turns to her husband.*

You'd better come and receive him too, dear.

SIR DEN. After what Betty's said I don't feel that I can face him.

LADY B. Nonsense! Come along, dear.

SIR DEN. Well, really—upon my word—never—never in all my life!—

He is still muttering when the door closes behind him.

Exeunt LADY BROUGHTON and SIR DENNYNS.

BETTY. (*Still laughing merrily*) Wasn't that just splendid of father? He'll never beat it! Never!—not if he lives to be a hundred.

Her merriment evokes no response from ALEC. His expression is gloomy. He sighs deeply.

Oh, what a dismal sigh! . . . What's the matter?

ALEC. I'm hanged if I can make you out!

BETTY. Am I so very sphinx-like?

ALEC. You're behaving damned badly, Betty!

BETTY. My dear Alec!—really!—

ALEC. You must have known that Smith wasn't philandering. He's not the sort of chap who goes in for rot of that kind.

BETTY. Oh, please, do let's talk of something else. . . . Are you going to captain the Sheffingham cricket team this year?

ALEC. Look here! If I tell you something that, p'raps, I oughtn't to tell you, will you promise never to say a word about it to him?

BETTY. (*Sighing resignedly*) Just as you like.

ALEC. There's nothing to be ashamed of in it. Only it may sound a bit sentimental—and a chap doesn't like to be thought sentimental.

BETTY. You're all ostriches—the whole sex of you!

ALEC. You'll remember that just after that business at Cojada, we were both knocked out?

BETTY. I remember.

ALEC. I only got a flesh wound, but it was touch and go with him. He nearly pegged out. Only one thing kept him alive—and that was his determination to see you again.

BETTY. Did he tell you so?

ALEC. That isn't the sort of thing a man tells even to his best pal.

BETTY. Then how do you know?

ALEC. I had the next bed to him. He was suffering like the deuce. The doctor said he must be going through Hell. But you never heard a sound from him, except at night when he must have thought that nobody would hear him. I shouldn't have known anything about it if I hadn't been sleeping

rather badly. The pain must have been awful, for every now and then he groaned—a queer, smothered sound—and after that I heard him whisper your name, just as though he were appealing to you:—“Betty! Betty!” . . . It was like a prayer for strength, and the thought of you seemed, somehow, to give it to him.

BETTY. (*Much moved, but determined not to show it*)
I'm not the only Betty in the world.

ALEC. You are, so far as he's concerned. You know you are! . . . Look here, old girl, if you turn him down now, you'll break his heart, and, if you do that, you'll do something that I, for one, shall never be able to forgive you. I hate to see any girl playing cat and mouse with a man—no matter who he is. But when it comes to the best fellow in the world, and my sister—damn it!—it's more than I can stick!

There is a moment's pause before BETTY goes up to her brother and lays her hand on his arm.

BETTY. Alec!

ALEC. (*Gloomily*) Well!

BETTY. I'm not altogether a beast.

ALEC. (*Appealingly*) Well, then, old girl——

BETTY. (*Now thoroughly upset and very near to tears*) But I can't marry him.

ALEC. (*In blank amazement*) Can't?

BETTY. It—it wouldn't be right.

ALEC. (*Alarmed*) Betty! What on earth d'you mean?

The voices of LADY BROUGHTON, SMITH, and SIR DENNYS are heard in the hallway outside.

BETTY. Sh!

The voices draw nearer.

Let's go into the garden. . . . Come along!

She takes her brother's arm, and pulls him through the open window into the garden.

A second later, and LADY BROUGHTON, followed by SMITH and SIR DENNYS, comes into the room. They are continuing obviously a conversation commenced outside.

SMITH is in mufti. He has grown greyer than he was in the previous act; but, otherwise, looks not a day older. He brings a square parcel into the room with him. This he deposits upon a chair or wherever may be most convenient.

SMITH. (*Half-laughing*) I can quite understand that it annoyed you.

SIR DEN. It did annoy me for the moment, I confess—until I saw the funny side of it. It's one of those occasions on which one has to be grateful for a sense of humour.

SMITH. (*Feeling free now to give unrestrained expression to his amusement*) Ha, ha, ha! Mullets!—It certainly is funny! . . . The fellow who reported you must be a person of imagination.

LADY B. Most journalists seem to be that!

SMITH. He must have thought that there were flying-fish in the Dardanelles, and that the Germans had trained them to "frightfulness"! They were quite capable of it!

SIR DEN. Capital! Capital! D'you mind if I use that in the letter of protest I'm going to write to the editor?

SMITH. Use it by all means, Sir Dennys. I'm delighted to make you a present of it.

SIR DEN. Thank you, Smith. It really is capital!—capital!

LADY B. I wonder where the others have got to? I felt sure we should find them in here.

SIR DEN. They'll be in in a minute—sure to be. (*He turns to SMITH*) Sit down, my dear fellow.

SMITH. Thank you. . . . As a matter of fact, Lady Broughton, I'm not at all sorry to find you and Sir Dennys alone.

LADY B. (*With polite interest*) Oh?

She casts an expressive glance in the direction of her husband, who begins, immediately, to feel and to look uncomfortable.

SIR DEN. That's a very pretty compliment to pay to two old people, General.

SMITH. (*As uncomfortable in his way as SIR DENNYS is in his*) I hope you won't feel otherwise when I've said what I want to say.

LADY B. I'm sure we shan't.

SMITH. I hadn't intended to say anything about it to you—just for the present, anyhow. But—well, my hand's been forced, as it were.

SIR DENNYS is puzzled. This is clear from the look he gives to his wife.

SIR DEN. Nothing's occurred to—er—to worry you, I hope.

SMITH. Oh, no. I suppose I ought to be rather pleased about it than otherwise. . . . When I got back from the ball last night I found a telegram waiting for me. It was a summons to town. I shall have to go up to-night.

LADY B. It's very unexpected, isn't it?

SMITH. Not altogether, but—

LADY B. Does it mean that you'll have to remain in town?

SMITH. By this time to-morrow I shall be a hundred miles and more from England.

SIR DEN. You're going abroad?

SMITH. Yes.

SIR DEN. For any length of time?

SMITH. That depends. I shall be away for some months, I expect. . . . I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to tell you where I'm going, or what I'm going to do. It's nothing of any great importance. It's just to straighten out one of the hundred and one little tangles that always have to be straightened out after a war.

SIR DEN. A Government mission, eh? . . . I congratulate you, my dear fellow. . . . That's splendid news, isn't it, Marian?

LADY B. It is, indeed. I should like to congratulate you too, General.

SMITH. Thank you very much. I only hope that I may manage to bring it off.

SIR DEN. I wouldn't mind gambling on it.

SMITH. It'll be a good thing for me, of course, if I do. But there's something I'd give a great deal more to bring off. It's about that I want to talk to you.

SIR DEN. (*Uncomfortably aware of what is coming*) Ah!

SMITH. I suppose it can't be a secret either to you or to your husband, Lady Broughton, that I—well, that I admire your daughter very much.

LADY B. (*Nervously*) D'you mean—er——?

SMITH. I mean that I love her, Lady Broughton—that I have loved her for—for a very long time now.

SIR DEN. Well, upon my word, Smith, this *is* a surprise! Isn't it, Marian?

LADY B. (*Given no option but to acquiesce in this preposterous statement*) Yes, dear, it's—a—a great surprise!

SMITH. Not a very welcome one, I'm afraid.

SIR DEN. On the contrary, my dear fellow. Speaking for my wife and myself, I'm sure there's nobody for whom we have a greater regard and admiration than we have for you. But—er——

SMITH. (*Disregarding the "but" in his enthusiasm*) By George, Sir Dennys, it's good of you to have said that! That's taken an enormous weight off my mind. I felt that I simply couldn't go away from Bet—er—Miss Broughton, without finding out whether it was to be "Yes" or "No." Now that I have your approval, I—I must just "put it to the touch to win or lose it all." It'll be a dreadful moment—far worse than going into the trenches for the first time!

SIR DEN. You haven't made any mention of your feelings to Betty as yet then?

SMITH. No—although I think she must know them. I suppose I'm a little old-fashioned in my ideas, but I felt it was my duty to speak to you and Lady Broughton first. And there's something else I think I ought to tell you.

LADY B. That's a consideration that isn't often shown to parents nowadays, General. I thank you for it. Indeed, I appreciate it more than I can say.

SIR DEN. And so do I—so do I! It's very good of you, Smith—very good of you. . . . Now then, what is this other dreadful confession that you desire to make?

SMITH. Well, although, of course, I'm retiring from any active part in the tailoring business, I'm still retaining an interest in it—a considerable interest.

SIR DEN. Why, naturally, of course. It would be absurd to give up a good thing like that.

SMITH. You really feel that?

SIR DEN. I do, indeed. Dukes run dairies and Countesses have bonnet-shops. Why shouldn't a General make a hobby of a tailoring establishment?

SMITH. I'm very pleased you take that view of it, Sir Dennys. It's relieved my mind very much.

LADY B. (*With ill-concealed anxiety*) Were you thinking of speaking to Betty to-day?

SMITH. I shall have to speak to her this morning.

SIR DEN. You don't mean before lunch?

SMITH. I'm afraid it'll have to be before lunch. I shall be obliged to leave here directly afterwards in order to catch my train.

SIR DEN. Well, of course, my dear fellow, you must do as you feel to be best. But do you really think it's wise?

SMITH. It's Hobson's choice so far as I'm concerned. But why shouldn't it be wise?

SIR DEN. Well—er—she got to bed very late last night, you know.

LADY B. She didn't get to bed until this morning.

SIR DEN. No, no, of course—this morning. In fact, she's only just finished her breakfast, and—er—well, you know what people are just after breakfast. I should hardly have thought it the best time to put things to the test.

SMITH. It's *the* time to put them to the test. If a girl will accept a man directly after breakfast, you may be quite sure that she loves him with no ordinary love!

ALEC enters by the window. He goes up to SMITH and shakes hands with him.

ALEC. Now then, sir. How are you this morning?

SMITH. Fit but sleepy. You?

ALEC. Much the same way.

He smothers a yawn.

SMITH *follows suit.*

SIR DEN. (*To ALEC*) Where's Betty?

ALEC. I left her in the green-house, talking to the gardener. She'll be in in a minute.

LADY B. Oh! Then perhaps we'd better—(*To SMITH*) You'd like us to leave you to—er——?

SMITH. Well, I think perhaps——

SIR DEN. Of course! Of course! (*He moves to the door*) Come along, my dear.

ALEC looks in puzzled fashion from one to another of the group. His mother sees the necessity of some explanation.

LADY B. General Smith has been called, unexpectedly, to town. He's leaving England to-night, and, before he goes, he—he has something to say to your sister.

ALEC turns in astonishment to SMITH.

ALEC. You going abroad? This is jolly sudden, isn't it?

SMITH. It's come sooner than I expected, but I had had a hint of it before.

ALEC. Some official business?

SMITH. Yes, a little Government job. Nothing much. But it may keep me away for several months.

SIR DEN. (*Agitatedly*) Just so—just so. Now, really, I think we ought to be going. I've no doubt Smith'll tell you more about it after lunch, Alec.

SMITH. If I'm able to remain to lunch.

SIR DEN. Eh? . . . Oh, yes, yes, I see what you mean. Yes, of course, in that case I quite understand you wouldn't care to stay. . . . But—er—

well, let's hope there'll be no need for anything of the sort.

LADY B. I'm sure we all hope that.

SMITH. That's very nice of you.

SIR DEN. Yes—yes! Well, come along, my dear. Come along!

He half drags, half pushes LADY BROUGHTON out of the room.

ALEC. There's no need for me to say anything, is there? You know how I feel about it. But—
(*His tone is gloomy in the extreme*)

SMITH. "But me no buts," Alec!

ALEC. Well, the only thing is—

He hesitates.

SMITH takes his meaning.

SMITH. You don't think I stand an earthly!

ALEC's silence gives consent.

SMITH continues:—

Well, I'm the only person who can make sure of that, and faint heart never won fair lady! If you're right I—I'm damned glad that I'm going abroad to-night!

ALEC's heart is too full for words. He holds out his hand with an impetuous gesture. SMITH understands, and grasps it. He says quietly:—

Thanks, old man.

ALEC turns on his heel abruptly, and goes out. Left to himself, SMITH proceeds to strip the wrappings from the parcel which he brought into the room with him. These removed, there is displayed a large box of chocolates elaborately tied with cherry-coloured ribbons. SMITH smiles to himself as he regards it.

BETTY *appears at the window.* SMITH'S *back is turned to her.* On observing that he is alone in the room, she hesitates and seems inclined, at first, to go away again. Eventually, however, she decides otherwise, and, standing in the centre of the opening, calls out to him suddenly:—

BETTY. All alone in your glory?

SMITH *springs to his feet, and, as he turns to face her, conceals the box of chocolates behind his back.*

SMITH. Ah! So you are up, Miss Broughton!

BETTY. Of course I'm up; but I'm horribly sleepy and dreadfully bad-tempered—and I don't think even the chocolates were worth it.

SMITH. (*Stimulating perplexity*) Chocolates?

BETTY. Yes! Chocolates! Those that you've got tucked behind your back there.

SMITH *laughs as he brings them into view.*

SMITH. You've got to prove to me first that you've won them!

BETTY. Won't you take my word for it?

SMITH. I didn't see you about when I arrived.

BETTY. That isn't to say that I wasn't about. You can't have been here for more than twenty minutes, and I must have been down—oh, hours before that. At least I feel as if I'd been waiting for you for hours.

SMITH. (*Laughingly*) The evidence is conclusive! I surrender my stake.

He hands the box to her with a courtly bow.

BETTY. Oh, what a lovely, big box!—and my favourite make! . . . Did you know they were my favourites?

SMITH. I make it my business to know everything.

BETTY. What a nasty, inquisitive person you must be! (*She removes the lid from the box and holds it out to him*) Have one?

SMITH. If you can find me a hard one.

BETTY. D'you really like the hard ones? That's rather nice of you. I can't bear them. I adore the soft ones. (*She selects a chocolate and gives it to him*) There I think that's a hard one.

SMITH *makes trial of it.*

SMITH. Brff! . . . It's a nasty, squashy thing!

BETTY. It isn't polite to talk with your mouth full!

SMITH. You know I'm glad you like the soft ones and I like the hard ones.

BETTY (*Munching busily*) Why?

SMITH. I think it's a good omen.

BETTY. What of?

SMITH. You'll see in a minute. . . . I'm going abroad to-night.

BETTY. Don't talk nonsense!

SMITH. I am, really.

BETTY. What for?

SMITH. Oh, some official business that I'm not allowed to tell you, and that would only bore you stiff if I did.

BETTY. Well, I hope you won't be sea-sick!

SMITH. That's very nice and thoughtful of you! . . . Don't you hope anything else?

BETTY. What do you want me to hope?

SMITH. Well, that I shall come safely back again.

BETTY. Oh, you'll do that all right. You're the kind of person who always comes back.

SMITH. Where he isn't wanted—eh?

BETTY. I didn't say so.

SMITH. You implied it. That's always been my luck. It must be rather nice to be wanted.

BETTY. You've become dreadfully serious all of a sudden.

SMITH. I feel serious. It makes one feel serious to realize that one's getting on in life, and that one has nothing to look forward to but a lonely old age.

BETTY. Poor old Methuselah!

SMITH. That's what it's coming to.

BETTY. What's the matter with the dream-woman? Hasn't she been giving satisfaction lately?

SMITH. (*With restrained passion*) I can't make believe any longer! I can't hold a shadow in my arms! I want the substance.

A pause. BETTY averts her eyes as SMITH draws nearer to her. She has grown now as serious as he.

Betty, I love you.

BETTY. (*In a low, strained voice*) I know.

SMITH. Don't you love me?

BETTY. Once upon a time, when I asked you that question, you said you mustn't answer it. It's the same with me now.

SMITH. I don't understand. Why on earth shouldn't you answer it?

BETTY. For the same reason that you felt you mustn't answer me. I'm not going to spoil your life. . . . You've fallen in love with a dream-woman—an ideal—not with me. You don't know the real me. If you did, you'd——

SMITH interrupts her—almost violently.

SMITH. I *do* know the real you! I know all that's divine in you, and all that's—that's just human. It's the human you that makes me want you so. I've got no use for a paragon of all the virtues. My

dream-woman wasn't a saint. She was just a natural, healthy, human girl—with all her faults and all her weaknesses. And that's what every man—who *is* a man—would wish his mate to be.

There comes a pause. BETTY is shaken, but strives hard not to show it. She persists:—

BETTY. I'm going to show you the real me. (*She holds up a hand to check the protest that SMITH would have made otherwise*) Please! . . . There was once a girl who fell in love with her father's tailor. She thought she had only to tell him so to—to make him her slave. She offered to marry him. He refused.

SMITH. He was in honour bound to.

BETTY. Oh, yes, I realize that now. But I didn't realize it then. It brought all the snob—the snob that I'd prided myself wasn't in me—to the surface. I felt that I'd made myself cheap in the eyes of a man, who—oh, forgive me!—was my inferior. I hated myself, and I *made* myself hate you. I prayed for a chance to hurt and humiliate you as I'd persuaded myself into believing that you'd hurt and humiliated me. I cherished the thought of it for years. At last the chance came. I took it. It was just before you went to the Front—d'you remember?

Recollection affects SMITH more than he desires to admit. He answers the question affirmatively by a motion of his head. BETTY continues, with a pitiful little attempt at a laugh:—

It didn't turn out quite the success that I'd anticipated. I hurt myself far more than I hurt you, and I hated myself as I'd never hated anything in the world before. . . . But it was not until the

news came that you'd been wounded that my real punishment began.

SMITH *turns to her in rapturous amazement.*
He exclaims in tone of wonder—almost of incredulity:—

SMITH. You've suffered like that because of me!

BETTY. People who throw boomerangs must expect them to come back again.

SMITH. (*A fierce joy in his voice*) Betty, you love me!

BETTY. * I love you so much that, for your sake, I'm going to endure my punishment to the bitter end.

SMITH (*Genuinely puzzled*) What do you mean?

BETTY. I'm not worthy of you. I've failed you once, when you needed me most. How do I know that I shouldn't fail you again? You mustn't take any risks. . . . You've got to marry somebody who'll be of real use to you—somebody who'll—

Despite his emotion, a twinkle comes into SMITH'S eye.

SMITH. Mayn't I be allowed to decide for myself whom I'm going to marry?

BETTY. Well, I—I suppose you'll have to in the end.

SMITH. Then I'll decide right away. So far as I'm concerned, the world holds just one woman—and that's you.

BETTY shakes her head.

BETTY. No, no!

SMITH. Do you refuse to marry me?

BETTY. I must.

SMITH. That's your last word?

BETTY. Yes.

SMITH. (*Gaily*) Splendid! That makes us quits!

BETTY looks up at him in blank amazement.

I've refused you once. You've refused me once.

Now we can start all over again with a clean sheet.

BETTY. (*Compelled to laughter in spite of herself*)

Oh, you're impossible!

SMITH. Of course I am. That's why I get on so well. . . . The impossible always comes off! . . .

For the second time of asking, will you marry me?

BETTY. No, no, really, I've quite made up my mind.

SMITH. Very well! Then I shall stay here until you exercise your sex's privilege of changing it.

BETTY. In that case I'm afraid you won't be able to leave England to-night.

SMITH. And you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you really *have* ruined my career!

BETTY. I call that a mean advantage to take.

SMITH. Oh, well, I suppose I can always go back and start as a tailor again. Think of the sign I could put up over the shop-door: "EDWARD SMITH, V.C. The only Brigadier-General in this street who received £12 per week as foreman-cutter"! . . . That'd fetch 'em, wouldn't it?

BETTY. As I've said before, you're impossible!

A discreet cough outside the door gives warning of WILSON'S approach. He enters.

WILSON. Beg pardon, miss, but you're wanted on the telephone.

BETTY. Who is it, Wilson.

WILSON. Mrs Wykeham, miss.

BETTY. Oh, bother!

WILSON. Can I give her any message, miss?

BETTY. Yes, Wilson, you might—just tell her I'm engaged.

A beaming smile spreads over WILSON'S face. He exclaims in high delight:—

WILSON. Oh miss, I *am* glad! May I take the

liberty of bein' the first to congratulate you? It's what we've all been hopin' for.

BETTY. (*Very much confused*) Oh really, Wilson, I didn't mean——

SMITH *moves to her side and takes her arm in his.*

SMITH. Miss Broughton meant just what she said, Wilson.

WILSON. Then I congratulate you too, sir.

SMITH. Thank you, Wilson.

WILSON. Thank *you*, sir. I'm sure the news'll be very gratifyin' to ev'rybody.

He goes out.

SMITH. Good old Wilson! We shall really have to make him a very handsome present. That's the second time he's been the God from the machine!

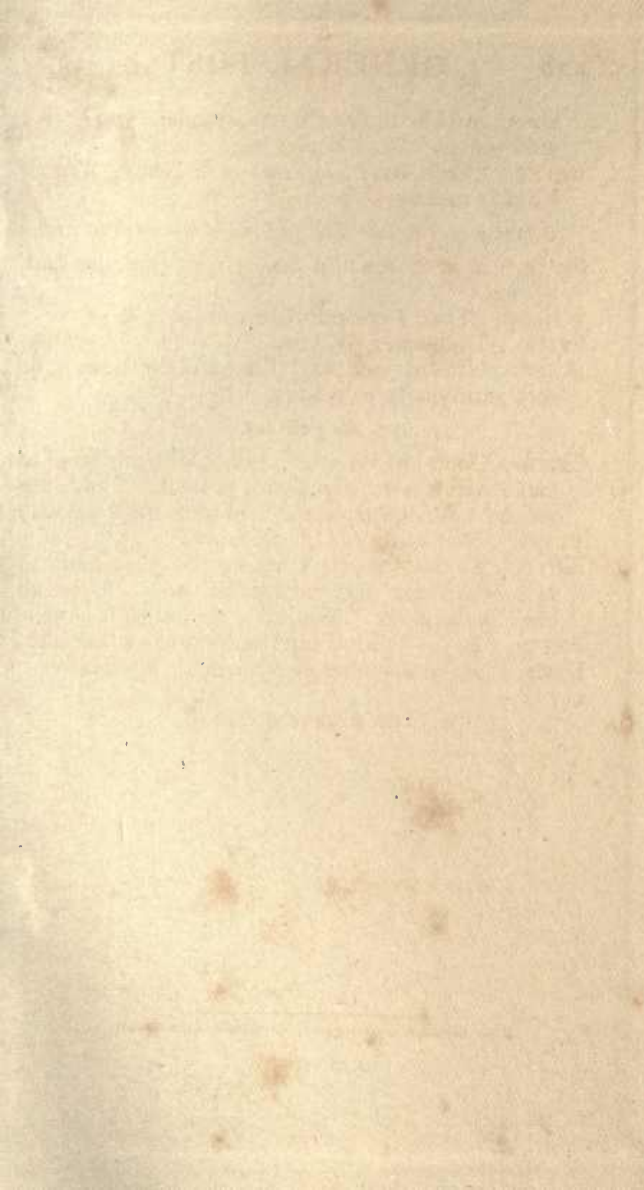
BETTY. You really *are* impossible!

SMITH. By this time he's telling the glad news to Mrs Wykeham, and in another hour it'll be all over Sheffingham. You can't get out of it now.

BETTY. I—I—I didn't say I wanted to get out of it.

SMITH (*As he takes her in his arms*) My dear!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.



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